PROJECT iTHRIVE: A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH BETWEEN CHURCH AND COMMUNITY FOR KEEPING FAMILIES TOGETHER

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ABSTRACT

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The context of this project was the intersection between the foster care system and faith-based institutions in Washington, D.C. Its goal was to raise the awareness of childhood trauma which can be caused by the removal of children from their parents and subsequent placement into a foster home. Medical experts equate the magnitude of the impact to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The project tested the hypothesis that if faith-based organizations were aware of the impact this trauma has on children, they could and would be willing to support at-risk families. The hypothesis was supported by the research.

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To God be the Glory for the great things God has done.

DEDICATION

To the great cloud of witnesses who watched from the stands after having passed the baton to me – to run on and see what the end will bring.

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INTRODUCTION

Children are the world's most precious, yet most vulnerable, population. All children deserve to live in a loving home with responsible adults who can provide them with the basic necessities—food, shelter, safety, clothing, medical care, and education. When children are unable to thrive in their present environment, as a result of maltreatment or neglect by their parents, the likelihood of a state agency's involvement is great. When children are removed from their homes, they are faced with an almost incomprehensible trauma that can set their lives on an irreversible trajectory from the foster care system through the juvenile justice system and into the penal system in the United States.

Faith-based organizations are, at least in part, service-oriented organizations whose key mission is to save or improve lives through the tenets of their religious beliefs. Therefore, it is natural to assume that such institutions could and would be willing to support at-risk children and struggling families; especially, those who reside within their community.

Project iThrive was created to inform members of the faith-based community of the negative affects trauma has on children and to increase their awareness of the issues associated with the foster care system. The project assumes that once the faith-based community becomes aware of these issues, they will be willing to join a collaborative network designed to support at-risk children and families. The purpose of the

collaborative network would be to lessen, if not prevent, children's removal from their homes by interjecting the faith-based community into the equation. The following pages

provide the foundations, research, and impetus for the doctoral project, Project iThrive. Each of the historical, biblical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations that undergird the iThrive doctoral project offer a unique thread that meets at the intersection of theory, concept, scripture, and theology. It is at the intersection of the foundations where the threads are woven to become the plumb line of liberation for traumatized children.

The purpose of the iThrive doctoral project is to reduce the number of children entering the foster care system by keeping families together. The removal of a child from the family home is a highly traumatic experience from which a child may not recover. Children who suffer from maltreatment, neglect, or abuse at the hands of their parents (or someone in their household) are oppressed and oftentimes deprived of an opportunity to thrive in life. Instead of having a carefree childhood, on the way to becoming productive adults, they become prime candidates for the child welfare system and other oppressive systems. Project iThrive seeks to confront the oppression that prevents children from thriving by developing a collaborative network of faith-based organizations to strengthen families in their communities.

The first chapter sets the foundation for intersection of ministry and the child welfare system. The church's mission to live out the gospel of Christ through the support of children and families becomes a call to action for the faith-based community. The need to support those who are at-risk in the project's context is aptly described in this chapter. The second chapter introduces the project's foundational biblical text, Lamentations 2:18-19, the cry for the liberation of oppressed children is magnified by Jeremiah as he beseeches Jerusalem.

> "Cry aloud to the Lord! O wall of daughter Zion! Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite! Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street."[1]

In this pericope, the author repeatedly warns Jerusalem of God's impending wrath. The author pleads with Jerusalem to save its neglected children by praying to God for help. Jerusalem's children were abandoned on the streets amongst the death and destruction of the inhabited city. The need for hope in the time of pain and suffering from loss is prevalent throughout the Book of Lamentations. The neglected children on the streets of Jerusalem are facing a hopeless situation and are in desperate need of help from a God who would care for them. It could easily be asserted that when Jesus saw children who were suffering, he felt the need to protect and heal them.

> Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And he laid his hands on them and went on his way (Matt. 19:13-15).

Chapter three explores the Orphan Train Movement, pioneered by Reverend Charles Loring Brace, as the historical foundation of Project iThrive. The train's purpose was to transport orphaned, neglected, and or poor children from New York City into the homes of Christian families in the Midwest. Reverend Brace presumed that children needed to be rescued from either the city streets or from parents who could not care for them and or give the opportunity to have a better life. If the children were not rescued, they would become a menace to society with no future nor opportunity to become productive adult citizens. The Orphan Train Movement, along with the Children's Aid Society and other

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[1] Biblical citations within this document are from The New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, Lamentations 2:18-19.

organizations, sought to improve the lives of vulnerable children and served as the precursor to the establishment of the federally run Children's Bureau which is presently responsible for the foster care system.

In chapter four, the theological precept, liberation theology, seeks to achieve freedom for the oppressed, as did Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry. Within the boundaries of liberation theology and the problem of child maltreatment, a child liberation theology emerged to speak to the specific needs of children. Child liberation is central to the objective of the project.

The maltreatment and neglect of children remains to be a problem today, ninety years after the Orphan Train's final journey. Families are still in need of assistance in raising their children and access to resources geared towards prevention. Project iThrive's faith-based network will aid in providing services that will improve the lives of children who are at risk of being removed from their parents and placed into the foster care system. The welfare and protection of children are the key components of the interdisciplinary field of social work, the subject of chapter five. Working within the contextual environment and the impact of the systems in which a child is embedded is the goal of systems theory. In order to provide relevant support to children and families, the iThrive Project will only be successful if there is an understanding of the child and the people, places, and things that have an impact on their life within their community.

Chapter six contains a thorough exposition of the doctoral project's implementation. The results of the pre-and-post-surveys are depicted in graphical illustrations. An analysis of the survey data includes insights gleaned from the faith-based leaders. The qualitative data extracted from the surveys informs the need for a

collaborative faith-based network to support at-risk children and families. In the end, the hypothesis was supported.

The doctoral project will be designed based upon scalable and repeatable processes that can be duplicated in other communities across the United States. Foster care systems exist in all fifty states in America. While not all foster care and child welfare systems are equal, their common denominator is children, children who deserve to live in a loving home. The need to prevent children from entering into the foster care system and to help parents who struggle to raise their children is the responsibility of the community. It cannot solely be the responsibility of state child welfare agencies, as is evidenced by the continued existence of oppressed children. The faith-based community is embedded in the communities where at-risk children and families reside and can support them. If children and families cannot rely on the faith-based community to help them, on whom can they rely? Charles Loring Brace said, “When a child of the streets stands before you in rags, with a tear-stained face, you cannot easily forget him. And yet, you are perplexed what to do. The human soul is difficult to interfere with. You hesitate how far you should go.”

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The welfare of children is the responsibility of the parents to whom they were born. Parents are responsible for providing the basic necessities such as food, clothing, education, shelter as well as safety for their children. When those necessities are not provided or if the safety of a child is at risk, the child may be removed from the parent's home under the authority of the state child welfare system. Depending upon the nature of the incidents, as well as, other mitigating factors, a parent's rights may be terminated, leaving the child an orphan, a ward of the state. The child welfare system then becomes the parent.

It is unrealistic to expect a state government to care for so many children; therefore, each state agency must recruit and train adults to foster them until they can be reunified with their birth parents or adopted parents. The number of children in need of a safe and stable foster home far exceeds the existing pool of available licensed foster parents.

Oftentimes, children in foster care are not only removed from their homes, but they are also removed from their neighborhoods, schools and support systems and placed into a new family setting. The removal and subsequent placement process cause an inordinate amount of trauma on the child and can jeopardize the child's ability to thrive in a new setting. Unable to deal with a traumatized child, foster parents become frustrated

with the child's behavior, feeling isolated and alone. Given the limited supply of available foster parents, everything must be done in order to keep the child with the foster parent/family and prevent the foster parent from returning the child to the child welfare agency.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY 2018 reports that approximately 687,345 children were served by the child welfare system, specifically, in foster care in the United States. As of September 30, 2018, there were 437,283 children in foster care.[2]

The successful stabilization of a foster child's placement with a new foster parent and or family is dependent upon a reliable support system. To be effective, this support system should provide support for the foster parents and the foster child. It should consist of a network of community partners who provide consistent wraparound support and services to the family in their local neighborhood. One such community partner is the local church.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the local church was the catalyst of the community. If someone in the community needed something, they would go to the church for assistance, and the church in turn would provide support. The church served as a stopgap between the citizen and the government. When government resources were unavailable, the church would step in to help. The creation of a family advocacy ministry to support the foster community will allow faith-based organizations to support foster families by doing the real work of ministry which in turn would transform lives.

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[2] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY 2018 Data," Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, accessed April 5, 2020, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb.

The Bible states in Psalm 68: 5-6, "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling. God sets the lonely in families." As a ministry leader in an urban area, and as one who was able to escape the foster care system by living with my father's family, I am compelled to develop a family advocacy ministry for the faith-based community. Families who raise at-risk children through adoption or foster care are a valuable resource and need on-going support. At the same time, those at-risk children who have been removed from their birth parents also require on-going support. What better role can the church play than supporting vulnerable children and families in their community? The purpose of this chapter is to provide a framework that will establish the ministerial and contextual focus of this ministry for the doctoral project.

Ministry Context

The Church

The Third Baptist Church (TBC) in Washington, District of Columbia (D.C.) will serve as the pilot church to establish a family advocacy ministry to support foster children and families. TBC is one of D.C.'s oldest historic black churches located in the District's Shaw Neighborhood in Ward 6. The church has a rich history of its support for the African Americans and African American families dating from its establishment in the1860s until today.

Under the leadership of Reverend George O. Bullock, who pastored the church from 1918 to 1959, Third Baptist Church grew to become one of the largest and most influential churches in the city. While the church was not considered one of the black elite churches in the city, it was active in the community. Reverend Bullock supported the

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Negro National Educational Congress by organizing mass meetings, seeking voting rights, and pushing for desegregation of the public schools and armed forces.

The legacy of the Third Baptist Church continued to be shaped by its seventh pastor, Reverend Henry Miles, who was installed on June 12, 1960. Pastoring during the turbulent period of the 1960s in Washington, D.C., Reverend Miles realized that the community needed the church. The church distributed aid to people in the neighborhood who were affected by the devastating riots of 1968 after the death of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Reverend Miles was known as a humanitarian who strongly believed in family and the well-being of all persons regardless of race, creed or color. Under his leadership, the church became dedicated to the mission of strengthening the moral fiber of the local community, the nation, and the world.

The Community

Washington, D.C. is confined to a relatively small area measuring sixty-one square land miles. The U.S. Census Bureau reports the city's population density as 9,856 people per square mile, at the end of July 2010.[3] The city's neighborhoods are divided into eight unique wards, separated by boundary lines and zip codes.

According to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey, Ward 6's total population is 91,093; thirteen percent of the District's total population.[4] One of the most

[3] "QuickFacts: Washington City, District of Columbia; United States," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed November 4, 2018, https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/washingtoncitydistrictofcolumbia,US/PST045219.

[4] "D. C. Office of Planning: 2013 – 2017 ACS Key Demographic Indicators," Planning DC, accessed November 4, 2018, https://planning.dc.gov.

historic communities in Ward 6 is the Shaw neighborhood, which is also home to the Third Baptist Church. The Shaw neighborhood is currently undergoing a gentrification and urban renewal. What was once an all African American tight knit community comprised of generations of families has now become more diverse with people of all races. The area varies from block to block. For example, there is a dog park on the northern end of P Street where dog owners bring their dogs to play. However, on the southern end of that same street, there is a park where drug addicts spend their day getting high.

Ward 6's demographics are dynamic as a result of the constantly changing landscape. There are five major neighborhoods (Northwest One, Mount Vernon Triangle, Union Station, Capitol Hill, and Barracks Row); and these wards vary significantly. The population in these neighborhoods totals nearly 60,000 people. The major neighborhoods are split among White (47%) and African Americans (43%), with Hispanics and Asians representing the other 10%. The data in these five neighborhoods reveals significant trends in total households, household size, household income, disposable household income, the education level of the homeowners/renter, and age demographics.[5] The U.S. Census Reporter provides key data findings specific to Ward 6. For example, there are over 45,000 housing units, with an average of 1.9 occupants per housing unit for four neighborhoods in Ward 6; Union Station/Burnham Place averages 2.1 occupants per housing unit.[6] In terms of household income, every neighborhood with the exception of Northwest One maintains an average annual household income of over $100,000. The

[5] "Neighborhood Profiles 2018 Edition Washington," DC Economic Partnership, accessed November 4, 2018, http://www.wdcep.com.

[6] U.S. Census Bureau, "Census Reporter: Ward 6, DC," American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018, accessed April 5, 2020, http://censusreporter.org/profiles/61000US11006-ward-6-dc/.

median income ranges from $59,803 in Northwest One to $117,881 in Capitol Hill. The median disposable income of Ward 6 households ranges between about $61,000 in Northwest One to approximately $103,000 in Capitol Hill.

Of the 91,093 residents in Ward 6, more than eighty percent are high school graduates. Ninety-seven percent of those high school graduates live in the Capital Hill community. More than half of the Ward 6 population in each neighborhood (except Northwest One) has a bachelor's degree. Lastly, the largest age demographic in Ward 6 is twenty to thirty-four years which includes the Northwest One, Mount Vernon Triangle, and Union Station communities. The largest population age demographic for Capitol Hill and Barrack Row.

The District of Columbia's Child Welfare System

The Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) is the District of Columbia's child welfare agency. Child and Family Services Agency investigates reports of child abuse and neglect and provides child protection. Services include family stabilization, time-limited foster care and supportive community-based services to support achievement of permanency through reunification, guardianship, adoption, and established lifelong connections. Services are designed to enhance the safety, permanence and well-being of abused, neglected, and at-risk children and their families in the District. Child and Family Services Agency tries to achieve the highest quality of community-based services, to increase the number of families who receive community-based preventive and support services. Additionally, CFSA expands the network of resources by providing services to at-risk children and their families to reduce the need for

involvement with the child welfare agency and placement in the foster care system. However, while the agency's goals are admirable, it is not always successful. All foster parents do not take advantage of the agency's services because services are limited; and the agency does not offer faith-based support.

Currently, there are 858 children in the District of Columbia foster care system. This number changes constantly as children are removed from their birth parents' homes on a daily basis; and also, as children achieve permanency through adoption or reunification with birth parents. The following charts depict the demographics of the 858 children. Most notably is the racial composition of the population. Eighty-nine percent of the children are African American; Caucasian children represent just 2.8 percent of the population. Fifty-one percent of the population are male, and 42 percent are female. The children in care range in ages from zero to twenty-one-years old; 52 percent are younger children (aged zero to eleven); and 48 percent are ages twelve to twenty-one.[7]

[7] "Demographics of Child in Foster Care PLC156," Government of the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency, February 12, 2019.

Table 1. Race demographics of children in District of Columbia foster care system[8]

Race	Number	Percent
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	0.12%
Asian	7	0.82%
Black or African American	768	89.51%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	0.23%
White	24	2.80%
Unable to Determine	1	0.12%
No Race Data Reported	55	6.41%
Total	858	100%

Table 2. Gender demographics of children in District of Columbia foster care system[9]

Gender	Number	Percent
Female	411	47.90%
Male	447	52.10%
Total	858	100%

The majority of the children in foster care reside in Wards 5, 6, 7 and 8; with Ward 8 containing fifty-three percent. The initial rollout of the model will take place in Ward 6 and will be replicated in other wards in subsequent phases. Presently, there are fifty-six percent children in the foster care system that live in Ward 6. Those fifty-six children are represented by twenty-eight percent foster families. The creation of the foster community model would provide an opportunity for those twenty-eight percent of families to join a support network within their community.

Ministry Journey

Recent work in the child welfare arena, led to the discovery of a personal childhood experience in what is called 'informal kinship care.' Children who are raised by real (blood relatives) or fictive (god parents, friends, schoolteachers, etc.) kin are in

[8] "Demographics of Child in Foster Care PLC156," Government of the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency, February 12, 2019.

[9] "Demographics of Child in Foster Care PLC156," Government of the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency, February 12, 2019.

kinship care. Kinship care is considered to be informal when the child has not been formally removed from her biological parents by the local child welfare agency.

My formative years were spent with my father's family in Washington, D.C., while my parents and siblings lived as a family in Annapolis, Maryland. Living with paternal family members (aunt and grandparents) from infancy until seven years of age was a necessity due to an unforeseen illness. A two-parent working household and school-aged siblings made it difficult to care for an infant at that time. Without the option to live with my paternal family, formal entry into the child welfare system would have been a reality. My life would have taken a far different path than the one eventually traveled. God has woven a spiritual tapestry throughout my life which began during my childhood. God covered me through the turbulent times of my childhood; shielded me from the hurt, harm and danger that fell upon my family and friends; and provided an angel to care for me when I could not care for myself.

Educational and professional experiences prepared me to become a leader in ministry. Upon graduating from high school, Howard University was the educational choice and French was the major with a minor in Business Administration. After earning the undergraduate degree, the educational pursuit continued by earning a master's degree in Management Information Systems. I later returned to school and earned a master's degree in Divinity from the Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology at Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia.

In addition to my formal education, various training programs in information technology, executive leadership and management that were related to my profession (IT) were pursued. I attended an executive leadership training at the London School of

Business in England, as well as management classes at American University and the University of Maryland. Further, professional certifications in project management and human resources were attained. These certifications were necessary to successfully manage multi-million-dollar programs and projects for the federal government.

As an information technology professional, climbing the corporate ladder was a difficult yet obtainable task that required hard work in an arena that was highly competitive and dominated by men. Throughout my professional experiences, my strengths were the ability to adapt to change, to quickly learn new things, to teach and or communicate information to people at all levels, and to organize and or manage projects. Despite career success, there was never a sense of satisfaction in the daily work. On the contrary, there was more satisfaction in the ministry and volunteer work. As a child, my aunt and grandmother exposed me to service and volunteerism. In my early adult years, my service and volunteer experience expanded to focus on issues such as poverty, illiteracy, feeding the hungry and teaching adults how to read.

In 2010, God changed my focus and directed me towards foreign missions; something in which I previously had no real interest. However, that changed when I went on my first foreign mission to Nigeria. My life changed in Nigeria. It was a hard mission, but I am grateful that my first mission was extremely difficult because I had no one to depend on except God. Upon arrival at the airport, and in witnessing the bleak conditions, I cried and asked God, “why am I here?” I did not think I would survive, but God had other plans. The conclusion was quickly reached to put personal struggles aside and complete the assigned task. From that time onward, I have continued to serve and help

those persons who cannot help themselves; those who cannot speak up for themselves and those who need someone to advocate for their best interests.

The next foreign mission took me to Cairo, Egypt for three weeks. The assignment was to teach English as a second language (ESL) to Egyptian Coptic Christian women and Sudanese women who were refugees. The women who attended my ESL classes not only wanted to learn English, but they wanted to learn more about God. Both groups of women had experienced oppression in their lives. The Sudanese women escaped the violence that ended the lives of their husbands and sons in the Sudan and fled to Cairo. Some of them witnessed the brutal killings of their loved ones firsthand while others escaped not knowing whether their sons were dead or alive. The Egyptian women were living in a culture where women were devalued, with their sole purpose in life was to raise their children and maintain the household.

My ministry worked in Haiti spanned the course of two years; I traveled to Haiti two to three times per year. The catastrophic earthquake that occurred in Haiti in 2010 resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of people. As a result of the enormous loss of lives, many children became orphans. My work first began by going on an exploratory trip to discern what God was calling me to do in Haiti. I saw the devastating impact that the earthquake had on Port-au-Prince and the surrounding affected areas. I traveled to the villages to witness how people lived and to interact with them personally. I worked with two local churches that owned schools and orphanages, and developed sponsorship programs for the schools which would allow children to attend for free. Many children and teens were unable to obtain a primary education due to the cost of education in Haiti; and as a result, Haiti has a high rate of illiteracy. By creating sponsorship programs,

donors could pay the cost of tuition, uniforms and medical care for one or more students. Without sponsors, very few children would be able to go to school.

My ministry focus has always been on both global and local missions; feeding the physical and spiritual needs of God's people. I am currently focused on my local context, Washington, D.C., which is a true mission field. In January 2018, I began a monthly community lunch program, which allows anyone to receive a free meal, and a clothes closet. As the executive minister of Third Baptist Church, I oversee the youth and young adult, women's, outreach and missions' ministries.

Prior to establishing the community lunch program in 2018 in an actual church building, I started a brown-bag lunch outreach to serve bagged lunches to people in the parks. To do this, I first surveyed the different feeding programs in the city that distributed food to the poor and homeless in the parks. I realized that most of the larger organizations who did this, frequented areas that were highly visible to the media and neglected the less desirable areas. Those areas that did not receive the attention needed assistance. Therefore, the focus was placed on those areas. Dedicated teams of volunteers were recruited and trained to not only hand out bagged lunches, but to also engage with the people they were serving, and to pray for those who desired prayer. Although the scope of this project was small due to limited funds, lives were still impacted.

As my ministry experiences have evolved from service to missions, my skills have also evolved. My ability to develop ministries based upon the needs of the people, coupled with my experience working in the child welfare field, will enable me to develop the family advocacy ministry within the faith-based community to support children and families in foster care.

Ministry Development

Foster care statistics are tragic. Studies show that over sixty percent of children and adults involved in sex-trafficking came out of the foster care system. Several states have prison populations where at least half of the male population was once in foster care. Girls who transition out of foster care become pregnant within two years; and their children come into the child welfare system creating a generational cycle. Children do not need to enter into the foster care system. They deserve to grow up in a safe, nurturing environment where they can thrive. Children who are placed into the foster care system experienced trauma and are at risk of facing negative outcomes. Children in the District of Columbia face nuances that are unique to their culture, location, and environment. The easy accessibility to drugs, the high rate of crime, and the continuous glamorization of gang membership and recruitment in Washington, D.C., makes it easy for African American children to travel down an undesirable path that would lead to disaster. Parents have difficulty raising their children and providing the necessities for them as a result of substance abuse, mental health issues, unemployment, or other reasons need the support of their local community to help care for the children. They need ongoing, consistent, judgement-free support. It takes a village to raise a child, especially in D.C.

As of November 01, 2018, there were 853 children in foster care in Washington, D.C. Approximately 25 percent of the children in foster care have experienced multiple placement changes; moving from one foster home to another. Compared to other jurisdictions, the District of Columbia has one of the highest percentages of children

living in poverty (26 percent compared to 19 percent nationally)[10] and has the highest proportion of children in foster care.

The number of children in need of a safe and stable foster home far exceeds the existing pool of available licensed foster parents. State regulations dictate the space requirements for a licensed foster home. In order to place a child in a foster home, the home must have a separate bedroom for the child. Many of the new apartments and condominiums in the city do not offer the amount of space required. Given this limitation, it is imperative that when a child is placed in a foster home, every effort must be taken to support the child and the family.

As previously stated, the topic to be explored through the Doctor of Ministry project is faith-based community support for at-risk children and families. The purpose of the project is to develop a faith-based model that will address the needs of families who are at risk of having a child removed from their homes and involvement with the child welfare system. The access to ongoing support would reduce the social isolation and embarrassment many parents feel when they lack the necessary resources to care for their children. The family advocacy ministry model will strengthen, support, and stabilize children and families by providing a safe space for growth, encouragement and reflection. Parents will have the opportunity to receive support and wraparound services from a faith-based institution in their community.

[10] "Demographics of Poor Children," National Center for Children in Poverty, 2016, accessed November 10, 2018, http://nccp.org/profiles/state_profile.php?state=DC&id=7.

Proposed Project

The proposed doctoral project will be called Project iThrive. The purpose of the project is to create a faith-based collaborative network to support families who are at risk of losing their child/children to the foster care system. The project will be designed for scalability and expansion in the near future to include additional churches in different cities.

The establishment of this support network within the faith-based community (as a ministry) adds a spiritual component to the network which is not available in government-based programs. Meeting the physical and spiritual needs of a family provides a holistic support system for the body, mind and soul. This holistic support is key in strengthening families. If the church implements the family advocacy ministry to support at-risk families, children will be less likely to face maltreatment, neglect, or abuse. The support provided by the faith-based institutions will be based upon the needs of the families in their specific communities. The core services will aim to strengthen family functioning by promoting family stabilization and preservation.

Once the faith-based institutions join the network, they will be required to recruit volunteers to maintain the program. Prospective volunteers will go through an application process answering questions about their previous experience with children and families, and to disclosed anything in their past which may affect their ability to serve the families. The application process will also include a background check in accordance with the church's Safe Church policy, as well as a Child Protective Registry check in accordance with the requirements of the Child and Youth, Safety and Health Omnibus Amendment Act of 2004, effective April 13, 2005 (D.C. Law 15-353; D.C. Official Code 4-1501.01 et

seq.). Upon the successful completion of the background check, the volunteer will attend training.

Volunteers will be required to attend training to prepare them to serve children and families who may have experienced trauma or who may come from a different background than the volunteer. The training will include an introduction to trauma-informed care, cultural humility, and how to interact in healthy ways with parents and caregivers. Upon completion of the volunteer training, the volunteer will be matched with a family or assigned to support a specific program. Professional volunteers, such as licensed therapists, will not be required to attend the abovementioned training. The purpose of the child-specific programs is to provide support for children. Programs will consist of mentoring, after school homework assistance, summer camp, and Vacation Bible School.

The adult-specific programs will support parents by providing individual and group sessions, resources for services and spiritual support. Volunteers may also provide temporary childcare services in order to give parents an occasional break or to run errands. From time to time, family-based activities will be scheduled for the entire family.

Families who want to join the program will be given a questionnaire that will allow them to identify the services they need and to relay any pertinent information that may be useful to the team. Upon receipt of the questionnaire, the parents will be contacted by a volunteer who will be assigned to manage their program activities and to serve as the family's main point of contact.

All children deserve to live in a stable, loving home environment where they can thrive and have an opportunity to grow up to become productive adults. When a child is removed from their homes, they experience a trauma from which they may not recover. The result of a child's trauma oftentimes presents itself in the form of mental health issues, learning disabilities, and undesirable behavior. Traumatized children are prime candidates for the foster care system to penal system pipeline. There are too many children in the foster care system, yet not enough programs to help strengthen families to keep children at home.

At the conclusion of the doctoral project, I expect to have increased my knowledge of the child welfare system (and its origins) in the United States, and the nuances of the District of Columbia's foster care system. The concept of caring for abused and neglected children by placing them into Christian homes began in the 1850s with the Orphan Train Movement. This movement was "the precursor to the modern foster care system in the United States."[11] Orphan trains as well as orphanages excluded black children; they were primarily sold into the slave trade and used as free labor. Now, 168 years later, the population of the orphaned has changed in that now the majority are black children.

I also expect to have learned how to effectively raise an awareness of the need for and obligation of churches and faith-based organizations to support at-risk children and families and to prevent involvement in the child welfare system. The Bible states in James 1:27 (NIV), "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted

[11] Angelique Brown, "Orphan Trains (1854-1929)," *Social Welfare History Project*, accessed November 4, 2018, https://socialwelfare.library.vcu.edu/programs/child-welfarechild-labor/orphan-trains/.

by the world." I will raise the awareness by increasing my understanding of the intersection of the gospel of Jesus Christ and social welfare, and then use this information to educate faith-based leaders.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

The biblical foundations chapter will focus on the Book of Lamentations. There is a parallel of pain and suffering expressed in Lamentations to the pain and suffering of orphaned, and abandoned children. The Book of Lamentations is replete with pain and suffering. The destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent loss of life, identity, land, community and family had to have been a traumatic experience for anyone affected by it. Jerusalem's captivity and exile to Babylon further magnified the loss. The poems contained in this Hebrew book of poetry provide vivid images of the pain and suffering that readers or singers of the verses on its pages can easily visualize. The poems summon Jerusalem to remember her inequities and to repent for her disobedience to God by crying out, repeatedly. However, what is missing from the 266 verses of poetry is empathy and compassion for Jerusalem's pain and suffering or a poem that provides an instruction for healing from loss. Orphaned and abandoned children are comparable to the Book of Lamentation because compassion often times missing for them as well. The only comforter throughout the text appears to be the narrator, whose ability to provide comfort is inadequate as witnessed in verse thirteen: "What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter Zion? For vast as the sea is your ruin; who can heal you?" (Lam 2:13).

The Hebrew Bible contains a book of poetry that one finds in the third section of this canon called Writings. Writings includes five short books originally written on scrolls to which some refer as "Megillot."[1] The exact order and location of these five books within different bibles varies based upon the tradition (e.g., Babylonian Talmud, Septuagint, etc.) one follows. Although the order of these five scrolls may vary, the books they represent remain static: Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. This biblical foundation focuses on the Hebrew book of poetry, entitled Lamentations.

The Hebrew name for the Book of Lamentations is "eykah" which means "how" and is the first word of the Hebrew text of Lamentations 1:1.[2] Given the nature of the book, the word "how" does not appear to be an interrogative, but an exclamation. One can treat this exclamation as a cry of protest or a complaint because it aptly expresses the loud cries of the people as they suffer their punishment from God and deal with the loss of their beloved Judean city, Jerusalem.

Lamentations encompasses a collection of descriptively sorrowful works of poetry that captures the mourning, regret and agony of the people of Judah. When people lament, they either cry out in grief, wailing or regret. For most people, one directs one's cry out in grief and despair toward God. The belief is that God is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient, and therefore God is the source of the grief. God caused the suffering and God is the one who can end the suffering. God's nature, as ascribed by the abovementioned characteristics, assumes God's ability change one's present condition.

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[1] Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd rev. ed., *The Anchor Bible* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 22.

[2] F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 16, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1993), 52.

Lamentations has several themes. One central theme is that God's judgment will come upon the disobedient and unfaithful, but through the pain and suffering resulting from God's judgement God remains faithful and wants a relationship with God's people. A more concise representation of this theme is this: finding hope through pain and suffering. Pain and suffering, created by loss, as represented in Lamentations 2:18-19 is the foundational basis for the anticipated Doctor of Ministry project; and will be the focus of the exegetical discussion of this chapter.

The authorship of Lamentations is a source of debate for some scholars. The traditional belief that Jeremiah is the author of Lamentations is not accepted by the majority. Those scholars who believe this work is of Jeremiahanic origin base their beliefs on several factors. The first factor is that the Septuagint (LXX) includes these words in the first chapter of Lamentations, "And it came to pass that Jeremiah sat weeping and composed this lament over Jerusalem."[3] Rabbinic writings on Lamentations also begin with the phrase, "Jeremiah said." The second factor includes the fact that the Peshitta (Syriac Bible) entitles the book as "The Book of Lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet." The last three factors include the facts that Jeremiah wrote elegiac poetry as evidenced in 2 Chronicles 35:25, Jeremiah loved Jerusalem and its people, and location in the canon (Lamentations is directly after the book of Jeremiah). Opposition to the belief of Jeremiah's authorship is based on the facts that the Masoretic Text (MT) does not include an author's name for the book; therefore, the author is considered to be anonymous.[4] Opposition is also based upon the factor that certain language in the book of Lamentations contrasts with Jeremiah's writings in the Book of Jeremiah. Lastly,

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[3] Hillers, *Lamentations,* 11.

[4] Hillers, *Lamentations,* 11.

opposition to Jeremiah's authorship is based upon the fact that the Book of Lamentations is anonymous in the Hebrew Bible and is located in the third section of the canon with the writings.

While it seems plausible that Jeremiah wrote Lamentations as he witnessed first-hand the destruction of Jerusalem and had direct knowledge of God's warnings of the coming judgment, the case is still debatable. For example, Lamentations includes statements that seem to be out of character for Jeremiah that question his authorship. Lamentations states, "Our eyes failed, ever watching vainly for help; we were watching eagerly for a nation that could not save" (Lam. 4:17).[5] This statement contrasts with a statement from the book of Jeremiah, "What then do you gain by going to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria, to drink the waters of the Euphrates?" (Jer. 2:18). Clearly, Jeremiah did not expect any help from other nations as stated in Lamentations 4:17. All in all, no resolution exists for the debate surrounding the authorship of Lamentations. However, for purposes of this foundational chapter, the author will remain anonymous.

The Septuagint presents Lamentations as a continuation of or a sequel to the Book of Jeremiah. Lamentations is the aftermath of the events that occurred in Jeremiah; therefore, it is necessary to review several key passages in the Book of Jeremiah, throughout this chapter, to obtain background information to aid in understanding the laments. Throughout the Book of Jeremiah, the prophet repeatedly warns Judah and Israel of God's coming judgment against Jerusalem as a result of their continued offensive behavior and their refusal to repent. The Judahites disobeyed God, ignored God's word,

[5] Biblical citations within this document are from The New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted, Lamentations 4:17.

listened to false prophets, and worshipped the Baals. God condemns their unfaithfulness and infidelity, likening their character to a prostitute: The Lord says to Jeremiah: 'Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and played the whore there? And I thought, "After she has done all this she will return to me"; but she did not return and her false sister Judah saw it'" (Jer. 3:6-7).

Despite Jeremiah's warnings of the impending doom that would befall them, neither Israel nor Judah would repent. They thought their continued worship of other gods in God's temple proved their faithfulness instead of recognizing it as a profane mockery. Therefore, Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled, and Jerusalem was destroyed by the wrath of God. God allowed Jerusalem to be captured by the Babylonians in 587 B.C. which led to the total destruction of the city as well as Solomon's temple. The Babylonians killed, enslaved and exiled the people. Those who were not killed or exiled to Babylon remained in Jerusalem amid the devastation. In the Septuagint, Lamentations picks up where Jeremiah ends with an introductory verse that reads, "After Israel was carried into captivity, and Jerusalem was laid waste, Jeremias sat down and wept, and sang this song of woe over Jerusalem, and said."[6]

The second chapter of Lamentations, in some translations, bears the title "The Anger of God" or "The Lord Became Like an Enemy." God's anger destroyed Jerusalem; but even in anger, God still listens for the cry of the repentance. The opening and closing verses of chapter two focus on the cause of the devastation of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is no stranger to God; she is God's daughter. God chastises those whom God loves (Heb.

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[6] Charles Thomson, ed., *The Septuagint Bible: The Oldest Version of the Old Testament* (Indian Hills, CO: Falcon's Wing Press, 1954), 1232.

12:6). God's chastisement is painfully realized in the abandonment of God's sanctuary, and in the fall and destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple. The specific pericope selected for this foundational chapter lies in verses eighteen and nineteen.

> Cry aloud to the Lord! O wall of daughter Zion! Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite! Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street (Lam. 2:18-19).

An exploration of this pericope begins with verse eighteen that opens with a plea to Jerusalem to cry out to the Lord. Evidence of the importance of this plea lies in this imperative phrase and its use of the action verb "to cry," followed by the adverb "aloud." The Hebrew verb is "tsaaq," which means to cry out like thunder. God did what God planned to do, and now in God's wake, God left Zion (Jerusalem) in a ruinous state of misery. Jerusalem's continuous disobedience and disrespect of God facilitated her eventual destruction. Notably, Jerusalem's enemies took credit for her destruction in verse sixteen, "All your enemies open their mouths against you; they hiss, they gnash their teeth, they cry: 'We have devoured her! Ah, this is the day we longed for; at last we have seen it!'" (Lam. 2:16).

Nevertheless, despite Jerusalem's enemies' underserved boasting, God was ultimately responsible for this disaster. God long ago warned Jerusalem (prior to the latest act of disobedience) that the city would be destroyed. Verse seventeen serves as a reminder of this fact, "The Lord has done what he purposed, he has carried out his threat; as he ordained long ago, he has demolished without pity; he has made the enemy rejoice over you, and exalted the might of your foes" (Lam. 2:17).

Moses informed the Israelites of God's statutes, ordinances and laws, and the ensuing punishments that would come if the people broke them:

> But if, despite this, you disobey me, and continue hostile to me, I will continue hostile to you in fury; I in turn will punish you myself sevenfold for your sins. You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars; I will heap your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols. I will abhor you. I will lay your cities waste, will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odors. I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it. And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste (Lv. 26:27-33).

God through Moses also warned Jerusalem that she would be captured by her enemies and enslaved if she did not serve God: "Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and with gladness of heart for the abundance of everything, therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and lack of everything. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you" (Dt. 28:47-48). Obviously, from the aforementioned pronouncements, the people could expect consequences for disobeying God. Therefore, God allowed Jerusalem to be captured, destroyed and kept under siege by the Babylonians. Not only did the Babylonians loot and plunder the city, but they killed officials, set the temple of the Lord on fire, and burned down buildings and houses.

As a result of Jerusalem's current state of devastation and its impact on her people, the poet implores Jerusalem to cry out loudly ("tsaaq") for help in her pain and suffering. The emphasis on the volume of the cry is noticeable and suggests that Jerusalem has been silent or shy in her calling out to God. In spite of the humiliation and ridicule generated by her enemies, who once envied her for being a great metropolis, she

still refuses to cry out or repent. The Lord says through the Prophet Hosea, "They do not cry to me from the heart, but they wail upon their beds" (Hos. 7:14).

The Septuagint captures the plea to cry out to God like this, "Their heart cried to the Lord: O walls of Sion, cause tears to flow down like a torrent day and night!" Here, the poet pleas with people in Jerusalem commanding them to cry out to God continuously. While Jerusalem may not want to turn to God for mercy, those who survived the fall of Jerusalem and either ended up in captivity in Babylon or remained in the city (Zion) want help. They realize that the only one who can help them is the one who has passed judgment on and punished them. Commentaries vary on this verse. Some state that the people were so desperate for help that they appealed for help to a wall, "O wall of daughter Zion." Does this infer that walls that once surrounded and protected Jerusalem remained intact and could help them once again?

Other commentaries imply that the devastation was so bad that even the walls that once stood needed to cry out to the Lord. The early church fathers (Jerome and Gregory of Nyssa) had a different interpretation of this verse.[7] They posited that the prophet Jeremiah, whom they attributed authorship of the text, knew that Jerusalem would not cry out to God, therefore he directed his appeal to the walls. Regardless of which interpretation is correct, God wants the people of God to repent from their sins and to turn to God for help in the midst of their agony and despair. Even though the walls had been torn down, God was still able to protect Jerusalem. Zechariah states, "For I will be a wall of fire all around it, says the LORD, and I will be the glory within it" (Zec. 2:5).

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[7] Dean O. Wenthe, ed., *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 12: 237.

The use of personification in this verse, "O wall of daughter Zion," is worth noting. Jerusalem is personified in different ways throughout the book a, "daughter" of God who is also a "grieving widow," "the community," and a "defeated soldier."[8] However, the implication of Jerusalem as a daughter of God contains a bit of irony in that God has destroyed the city; God's own beloved daughter who was once considered too holy. Now God has become the enemy. Does this make God an abusive and neglectful parent who humiliates God's own daughter to exact revenge, or a loving and strict parent who does not spare the rod?

In addition to crying out, the poet commands Jerusalem to repent for her sins. Repentance requires crying that generates tears, and the intensity or volume of the tears may be quantified by the magnitude of the sin. Jerusalem is required to "let tears stream down like a torrent day and night!" The poet uses a metaphor to compare Jerusalem's requirement to a flood of water. In other words, Jerusalem must pray to Yahweh and repent for her sins, day and night. The poet's use of tears as a metaphor in this context is significant. Jerusalem, as chief mourner, must repent with tears to signify her sincerity and regret.

The command in verse eighteen is a call for a communal mourning and repentance. Yahweh destroyed the land, the cities and the people, and is the only one who can bring healing and restoration. No mortal can help Jerusalem at this time. She has an incurable wound that only Yahweh can heal and restore.[9] In verse nineteen, the narrator

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[8] J. Daniel Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, Teach the Text Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 329-353.

[9] Xuan Huong Thi Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible*, vol. 302, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, LTD, 1999), 143.

uses imperative phrases to command Jerusalem to repent, "arise, cry out," "pour out your heart," and "lift your hands." The destruction of Jerusalem and its aftermath should not facilitate a period of inactivity and silence. Instead, it should encourage a time of action and reconciliation with God. The Hebrew word used is "qum" meaning to "get up from, something newly set."[10] Captured by the Babylonians forced Jerusalem into bondage. Despite this tragic event, the poet commanded Jerusalem to "arise," to get up from this new state of being in which she found herself. The action of rising suggests a movement from a low place to a higher place. By rising up, the Jerusalem would move from the place of sin and unrepentance to a higher place where she could cry out to God. The command to "get up" from a state of sin is also used in Genesis 19:15. When the angels went to Lot's house to warn him to take his wife and daughters out of the house before the imminent judgment came upon Sodom and Gomorrah, they commanded Lot to "get out." The Hebrew word used to express this command was also "qum." Lot and his family lived in a place of sin and depravity; a place that God would soon destroy.

The Hebrew word "ranan" means to cry out in distress.[11] This command requires Jerusalem to cry out by petitioning and praying to God. To pray fervently to God, not the gods she worshipped in disobedience to God; but to the God who judged her harshly. Jerusalem experienced an enormous amount of distress as she witnessed the devastation and demise of what was once hailed as a great city, and the death of her people. Crying out in distress requires one to take a personal inventory of oneself in order to recognize one's transgressions against God. Once taken, a change must occur. This change is a

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[10] Francis Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 1110.

[11] Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 943.

change in mindset wherein one makes a conscious decision to turn away from sin. If this does not happen, true repentance cannot occur. The Apostle Paul instructs the Romans not to be conformed to the world, but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2). In other words, the only way to change one's ways is to change one's mindset or one's way of thinking. Once Jerusalem decided to change, she could then repent for her transgressions and ask God for forgiveness.

The execution of the command to arise and to cry out was supposed to occur at the beginning of the watches. The watches occurred at night over a period of twelve hours. The periods were divided into three four-hour periods.[12] The command to "arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches" instructs Jerusalem to get up from her state of misery and despair, to repent for her transgressions, and to pray to God throughout the night.

The next command instructs Jerusalem to "pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord!" The Hebrew verb "shaphak" used in this text means to pour out like water.[13] The poet uses this metaphor, "pour like water" where the water represents tears that are created from Jerusalem's cries of distress and mourning. The poet urges the exiles, enslaved by the Babylonian army, to pour out their hearts to the Lord to show remorse for their sins. In Hebrew, the heart is a place where one makes choices and decisions; the place where repentance occurs. A heart that pours out tears is not a hardened heart, but a heart that is remorseful, a heart that wants change, and a heart that is hopeful.[14] All emotions resonate in the heart which then result in an external

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[12] Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 466.

[13] Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 1049.

[14] Hays, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 337.

physical action. The emphasis here should not only be on the weeping or tears but on the heart because the tears are the outward manifestation of emotion. That emotion begins in the heart, and a broken heart would result in an outward display of weeping. In verse eleven, seeing the hungry children left on the desolate streets with no food breaks the poet's heart and as a result, he weeps, "My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of my people, because infants and babes faint in the streets of the city" (Lam 2:11). Jerusalem should be heartbroken at the sight of the children who have been left on the streets to die and cry out to God. God, as David can attest, is the only one who can deliver the brokenhearted. He writes, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord rescues them from them all" (Ps. 34:18-19).

Verses eleven, eighteen and nineteen imply that Jerusalem's heart was uncircumcised because her heart was unchanged despite the inevitability of the nation's destruction. Therefore, the poet's imperative to Jerusalem to "pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord" is a necessary imploration, once again, to get her to repent before God. On the contrary, one can also entertain the possibility that Jerusalem had already been in a state of mourning and weeping over the destruction of her city and its resulting impact on her people, beginning in the first poem.

In chapter one and verse sixteen, Jerusalem seemingly grieves, "For these things I weep; my eyes flow with tears; for a comforter is far from me, one to revive my courage; my children are desolate, for the enemy has prevailed" (Lam 1:16). If the poet continually begged Jerusalem to cry out to God, perhaps her groanings were not directly associated

with her repentance. Instead, her weeping at this particular point in time may have resulted from her humiliation and ridicule in the eyes of her enemies; the loss of that which made her a great city; and the sheer abandonment by her previous "lovers."

Lamentations reads, "Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street" (Lam. 2:19). This final imperative of verse nineteen summarizes the basis for this pericope. First, it is important to define the Hebrew verb for "lift" which is "nasa" and means to "lift hand to heaven in prayer."[15] The verb "nasa" is used 193 times in the Bible as a universal gesture in the act of praying to God. This is illustrated in the book of Psalms where it reads "Hear the voice of my supplication, as I cry to you for help, as I lift up my hands toward your most holy sanctuary" (Ps. 28:2). Also, Psalm 134 reads "Lift up your hands to the holy place, and bless the LORD" (Ps. 134:2). The lifting of hands to heaven is the way in which the petitioner reaches up to heaven to access God. This is another plea to Jerusalem to pray to God.

The next Hebrew verb of importance is "ataph," which means to be feeble or faint.[16] At first glance, it appears that this verb would mean "faint" especially when coupled with the noun "raab," which is the Hebrew word for hunger or starvation (from famine).[17] However, in this particular sentence, "ataph" is translated as "feeble." The same translation is used in Genesis to describe the weak flock that Jacob bred for Laban as it reads "but for the feebler of the flock he did not lay them there; so the feebler were Laban's, and the stronger Jacob's" (Gen. 30:42).

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[15] Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon,* 670.

[16] Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon,* 742.

[17] Brown et al., *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon,* 944.

Jerusalem's children were abandoned without food to sustain their lives. They are described in the text as feeble, starving, and near death. A shortage of food or a famine is a death sentence for anyone subjected to such circumstances. One place where the Bible references this is in Jeremiah, "Even the doe in the field forsakes her newborn fawn because there is no grass" (Jer. 14:5). Another instance is in Lamentations where it reads, "Happier were those pierced by the sword than those pierced by hunger, whose life drains away, deprived of the produce of the field" (Lam. 4:9).

The totality of verse nineteen may be loosely translated as "Jerusalem, repent, and pray to God without ceasing for the lives of the innocent children." As a result of her destruction, death littered the streets of Jerusalem; and the destruction left children to die without food and no one to take care of them. The Babylonians were killed or led into exile. Their parents were either killed or led into exile by the Babylonians. Who remained to care for the children? They did not deserve to die for the sins of their parents. The repetitious appeals for repentance obviously reflect Jerusalem's refusal to repent. She refused to heed the warnings prior to God's wrath raining down on her and her people, and still did not repent after the remnants of the city smoldered. Unable to persuade her to repent and pray for herself or her people, the poet makes an appeal for the lives of the abandoned children. If Jerusalem will not turn to God for herself, she should do so for her children. Isaiah adds "Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Is. 49:15). Jerusalem must lift up her hands in order to reach God in the heavens and pray to God to spare the lives of her children who have been abandoned and are dying on the streets.

In conclusion, upon reading the book of Lamentations, one cannot help but to feel the people's cries of agony and suffering and characterizing them as victims. It would also be reasonable to blame God for the pain and suffering that has been placed upon the people and assume that Judah always repented and sought absolution from God. However, what lies behind those assumptions is that Jerusalem refused to repent until the final poem of the book. It was not until the catastrophic events that led to the captivity and death of her people that Jerusalem recognized that her suffering was a result of her disobedience and defiance of God and confessed her sins through repentance. The realization that Jeremiah had been correct about God's coming judgment on Jerusalem and the magnitude of God's wrath did not occur until much later.

The Book of Lamentations is replete with pain and suffering. The destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent loss of life, identity, land, community and family had to have been a traumatic experience for anyone affected by it. Jerusalem's captivity and exile to Babylon further magnified the loss. The poems contained in this Hebrew book of poetry provide vivid images of the pain and suffering that readers or singers of the verses on its pages can easily visualize. The poems summon Jerusalem to remember her inequities and to repent for her disobedience to God by crying out, repeatedly. However, what is missing from the 266 verses of poetry is empathy and compassion for Jerusalem's pain and suffering or a poem that provides an instruction for healing from loss. The only comforter throughout the text appears to be the narrator, whose ability to provide comfort is inadequate as witnessed in verse thirteen, "What can I say for you, to what compare you, O daughter Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O virgin daughter Zion? For vast as the sea is your ruin; who can heal you?" (Lam 2:13).

The comforter who walked alongside David while he was in the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23) is missing. The author of the covenant who promised loyalty cannot be found. The protector has placed a cloud over Zion (Lam. 2:1) not seeing her destruction and devastation, and not hearing her cries for help. Instead, there is no response to Jerusalem's petition to God. God appears to be silent. No comforter is sent to provide comfort. Health is not restored; children are not returned; nor is there a return to any semblance of order or human dignity.[18] Despite the egregious nature of Jerusalem's sins, it appears that under Deuteronomic law, death was the penalty for sin. Therefore, exile to servitude in Babylon must have been an added bonus. Those who remained living in Zion amongst the devastation, death and despair were unfortunate.

Why was Jerusalem's heart so hardened that she would not repent, even after the destruction of all that she held dear? God gives everyone free will, which allows people to do what they wish to do. God's omniscience and omnipotence gives God the ability to know what is going on at all times. But does it mean that everything bad that happens can or should be attributed to God? If that were the case then the Holocaust, school shootings, mass shootings, and other man-made atrocities would be attributed to God and not the actual persons who were responsible for them. The invasion and subsequent siege of Judah lasted over a period of nearly two years as King Nebuchadnezzar's armies triumphed over Jerusalem. Yet, after all of the suffering and tragedy, Jerusalem made a decision not to repent for her sins on her own accord and suffered the consequences of that decision.

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[18] Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Book of Lamentations: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections*, The New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 6: 43.

However, the good news is that God loved God's people so much that God gave God's only begotten son so that everyone who believes in God may not perish but may have eternal life. This gives Christians a reason to rejoice because God is able to turn mourning into joy, through Jesus Christ, their Lord and Savior. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he tells them that community of fellowship is a sign of true Christianity, "rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep" (Rom. 12:15). By weeping as a community, the hearts of sinners will melt and then they too will weep and repent for their sins.

The ministry opportunity identified through my spiritual autobiography, context analysis, and synergy is the creation of a collaborative faith-based network that will support families whose children are at-risk for removal from their homes by the child welfare agency. Children are a gift from God and play an important role in the familial structure; they are sources of joy to their parents. One of the Psalms states, "He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children" (Ps. 113:9).

By supporting these families with wraparound services, the faith-based community will provide a support system that will have a significant impact on children and their parents. The ultimate goals of the network are intervention and prevention of child abandonment. The suffering of children resulting from neglect or abandonment will cause them to lament or to cry out loudly for help. This should be avoided at all possible costs especially since it could result in death. While it is no secret that Jesus lamented, on the Good Friday cross, as God's forsaken, abandoned son, Jesus' lament was not only a theological protest against divine abandonment, but it was also a political protest against

an empire that executes the righteous.[19] Children need a divine support system that will stand up to the empire that so readily oppresses them.

In the Washington, D.C. area, communities are surrounded by institutions of faith, i.e., churches, temples, synagogues, and mosques. In some communities, there is more than one institution within a two-block radius. There is an abundance of churches that cater to the city's diverse religious and cultural population. If a family experiences an issue that may ultimately result in child abandonment, neglect or abuse, a member of the network will intervene and help that family by providing resources. Intervention prior to a negative action prevents the occurrence of irreversible trauma to the child.

The removal of children from their parents and subsequent placement into a foster home or institutional facility has a traumatic effect on children of all ages. Medical experts equate the magnitude of the impact this trauma has on children to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The church may prevent the abandonment, neglect and or abuse of children. The available options to a child should not be limited to the foster care or the juvenile justice system. Every child deserves to live in a loving home and have the opportunity to thrive. When the parents cry out for the lives of their children, just as Jerusalem was implored to do, they will have the assurance of hope in the church. The lives of the children can by spared, and they too can find hope in the church of Jesus Christ.

> Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And he laid his hands on them and went on his way (Matt. 19:13-15).

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[19] Walter Brueggemann, "Lament as Wake-up Call: Class Analysis and Historical Possibility," in *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts*, ed. Nancy C. Lee and Carleen Mandolfo (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008), 221-236.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The basis of the ministry opportunity identified for this doctoral project is the welfare of children. All children deserve to live in safe loving homes, with loving and responsible parents, where they can thrive and become productive citizens of society. While this may seem to be an inherently obvious declaration, one should not assume its actuality. There are factors and circumstances that occur in a child's life that prevent the child from thriving in the child's environment. Poverty, domestic violence, and abuse (substance, physical, emotional or sexual) can greatly impact a child's welfare and prevent parents from providing the minimally acceptable standard of care for their children. When a child is exposed to any of these negative factors, the outcome is oftentimes in the form of child maltreatment that presents itself as abuse or neglect, thereby opening the door to the state child welfare agency. The worst-case scenario is realized when a state child welfare agency's involvement results in a child's removal from the child's home and the child's placement into foster care.

The proposed doctoral project will offer a solution that would provide families, who struggle with the challenges of parenting while encountering the ills of society in their environment, access to a network of positive support reinforcements. The project proposes the creation of a collaborative faith-based network that will support families whose children are at-risk of being removed from their homes by the state child welfare

agency. The faith-based network would provide support to families in a variety of ways based upon the family's needs and the network's available resources. Some of the areas in which this network may provide support include faith-based counseling, parenting classes, employment and employment readiness training, tutoring, mentoring, recreational activities, and other specialized training. The network would also assist with basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. Some organizations within the network will likely already have well-established community outreach programs that would align with the needs of the targeted families. By supporting these families with wraparound services, the faith-based community will provide a support system that will significantly impact children and their parents.

The goal of this collaborative network is two-fold: to raise faith-based institutions' awareness of the struggles of the people in their communities and to get these institutions involved in the solution. If a child faces abandonment, neglect or abuse, a member of the network will intervene and help that family by reaching out to the family to assess its needs and providing the necessary resources. Intervention prior to a negative action prevents the occurrence of irreversible trauma to the child. When the parents cry out for the lives of their children, just as Jerusalem was implored to do, they will have the assurance of hope in the church. The lives of the children can by spared, and they too can find hope in the church of Jesus Christ. Matthew records these words:

> Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." And he laid his hands on them and went on his way (Mt. 19:13-15).

The faith-based community's support of at-risk families will reduce the likelihood of children's removal from their parents' homes and children's placement into the foster care system. In Washington, D.C., the majority of the families who are involved with the child welfare system are primarily contained within two of the city's poorest wards or areas; specifically, Ward Seven and Ward Eight.

Drugs, violence and poverty plague families in these wards, and these three societal factors have a trickle-down effect on the lives of innocent children. When an area is infested with poverty, drugs and violence become unwanted occupants. However, this problem is not unique to the Washington, D.C. geographical area. America has struggled with the issue of poverty for many years and still continues to struggle today. There is no magical or one-size-fits-all solution to this problem. Poverty plays a crucial role in the parenting process and in a family's social context. Poor families are more susceptible to child maltreatment because it facilitates the family's isolation from its social context.

Poverty takes a toll on the lives of the entire household and contributes to child abuse and neglect. The challenge lies in finding a solution that would aid those families impacted by these societal factors, by removing the perceived stigma and preventing the family's isolation before the situation negatively impacts the children. Jay Belsky states:

> There is an abundance of evidence linking social isolation and limited social ties with elevated risk of child abuse and neglect…Other investigations reveal that maltreating parents have small peer networks, though this result is not always obtained; have less contact with, and receive less help from their family of origin and other relatives; feel lonely; are socially isolated; and are less likely to have a phone…Maltreating parents do not use community resources that are available; are not involved in community activities, including church-related ones; and do not discuss their problems with anyone.[1]

[1] Jay Belsky, "Etiology of Child Maltreatment: A Developmental-Ecological Analysis," *Psychological Bulletin* 114, no. 3 (November 1993): 422, accessed May 6, 2019, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/14925757.

Many churches supported and continue the support of children in the foster care system for several years, but the approach proposed in this doctoral project is different. The nuance of this approach is the concept of collaboration. This approach requires faith-based institutions across denominational constructs and religious doctrines to work together for the common goal of supporting children and families. Working together as the universal church to tackle an age-old problem: the need to disrupt the 'child welfare' system and its negative impact on the lives of vulnerable children. Solving this problem for just one child, would allow one child to thrive in a safe, familial environment and become a productive citizen in the child's community.

Recognizing the continued plight and increase of neglected children in New York City, Charles Loring Brace established the Children's Aid Society in in 1854.[2] The city's child welfare practice was in dire need of reform. Prior to this, more and more children appeared on the city's streets as a result of an influx of immigrants from European countries who came to America, "the land of the free and home of the brave," without resources to support the life they desired.[3] These immigrants entered their new lives penniless, hungry and confused, which resulted in the separation of children from their parents.[4] Brace and his newly established Children's Aid Society envisioned a way to help orphaned children by removing them from the streets and placing them into homes in the Midwest of America. Trains transported the children from New York City to the

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[2] Renee Wendinger, *Extra! Extra! The Orphan Trains and Newsboys of New York* (Sleepy Eye, MN: Legendary Publications, 2010), 13.

[3] Francis Scott Key, "The Star Spangled Banner," 1814.

[4] Herman D. Clarke, *Orphan Trains and Their Precious Cargo: The Life's Work of Rev. H.D. Clarke*, comp. Clark Kidder (Bowie, MD: Heritage Books, 2001), xiii.

Midwest, thereby starting the Orphan Train Movement.[5] The purpose of this chapter is to take a cursory exploration of the origins of the Orphan Train Movement as it relates to the initial practices of child welfare, its impact on children and families affected, and the intersection of the child welfare system and the church.

Charles Loring Brace was born on June 19, 1826 to John Pierce Brace and Lucy Porter Brace in Litchfield, Connecticut. Lucy Porter Brace was the sister-in-law of Lyman Beecher, father of Harriet Beecher Stowe. John Brace taught at the Litchfield Female Academy, a school that his aunt founded in 1792.[6] Brace's upbringing impacted the obligation he felt to care for poor children. Brace's father was a Calvinist and educated his son in accordance with Puritan tradition and Romanticism.[7] The seventeenth century Puritanical tradition espoused that children were born damned as a result of Adam's fall, and deserving of whatever punishment God gave them. Their understanding of salvation was of predestination in that God had already chosen 'the elect' whom God would save, and there was no way a sinner could be born again; there was no conversion. The cadre of God's elect was small in number. Some theologians believed that the elect would not know they were saved until they found themselves in Paradise. Author Stephen O'Connor writes on this matter, "Although God was technically free to grant second birth even to the most loathsome of sinners, most people assumed that he did not have much use for this freedom, and that the elect could be identified by their superior virtue –

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[5] Wendinger, *Extra! Extra!*, 13.

[6] Stephen O'Connor, *Orphan Trains: The Story of Charles Loring Brace and the Children He Saved and Failed* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 7.

[7] O'Connor, *Orphan Trains*, 16.

especially by their capacity for self-denial."[8] Contrary to Puritanical traditions, Romanticism allowed a more favorable view of children. Children were innocent at birth, and their natural character was viewed as 'holy innocent' Christians.[9] Children were not to be damned but saved by moral adults. Puritanical traditions and Romantic philosophy comprised Brace's fundamental belief system, which greatly influenced his life's work.

Upon graduating from Union Theological Seminary in New York, Brace served as a minister to the poor on Blackwell's Island and at the Five Points Mission for a while before leaving the church to focus on humanitarian issues. Poverty, especially due to its effect on poor children, disturbed Brace. His Puritan, Calvinist, and Romanticist upbringing informed his belief that abandoned or neglected children were innocent and needed to be saved from their licentious irresponsible parents. The parents were beyond saving. In 1852, Brace wrote a letter to his father in which he stated:

> If I am only a city missionary with two hundred dollars a year, or anything else mean, but really doing good, you should be contented. I don't care a straw for a city pastor's place. I want to raise up the outcast and homeless, to go down among those who have no friend or helper, and do something for them of what Christ has done for me. I want to be *true* – true always. Not orthodox, or according to any one school or sect, but to follow my own convictions of truth. So did Christ.[10]

In 1853, Brace founded the Children's Aid Society (CAS) in New York with a group of supporters who were equally concerned about the welfare of children. There are discrepancies regarding the actual year that Brace and his supporters established the Children's Aid Society. Some sources indicate the year as 1853 and others indicate it as 1854. However, the organization's website states its year of origination as 1853. This

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[8] O'Connor, *Orphan Trains*, 9.

[9] O'Connor, *Orphan Trains*, 13.

[10] Clarke, *Orphan Trains and Their Precious Cargo,* 10.

date will be used for this chapter. Brace served as the secretary of the organization until his death. During the period in which Brace and his supporters established the CAS, New York's child welfare practices consisted of placing abandoned, homeless, or neglected children into state-run or private institutions such as orphanages or workhouses that were overcrowded. Some children were informally adopted by relatives or strangers, while a large number remained on the streets. Aware of the need for a better solution for children, Brace posited that CAS could fill the existing gap in the services of the New York public agencies by providing care for children that the overcrowded orphanages affected or those for whom an institutional setting was inappropriate.[11] In addition to being overcrowded and warehousing parentless children, orphanages had several problems. These problems include the fact that they did not prepare children for life in the community, most children had no desire to live in an institutional setting. They had harsh discipline systems and discharged children arbitrarily; and they had discriminatory admission policies. Admission was based on race, ethnicity and religion.[12] Brace proposed that CAS could do a better job in caring for the children and providing better outcomes for their future. By his judgement, children would have better lives if they were removed from the city's streets and overcrowded orphanages and placed with Midwestern Christian families. The opportunity to live with a Christian family would expose children to the "civilizing influences of American life."[13]

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[11] Eve P. Smith and Lisa A. Merkel-Holguin, *History of Child Welfare* (Rutgers, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996), 176.

[12] Smith and Merkel-Holguin, *History of Child Welfare*, 176.

[13] Charles Loring Brace, *Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' among Them*, facsimile ed. (1872; repr., Silver Spring, MD: National Association of Social Workers, 1973), 12.

The method of "placing" or "putting" children into homes or institutions was referred to as "placing out." Brace referred to it as an "Emigration Plan."[14] Brace attributes credit of creating a unique innovative way of delivering child services to the CAS. However, the CAS was not the first organization to use the method of removing large numbers of children from destitute environments such as the street or an orphanage and placing them into homes. Persons in Europe practiced this method. The English created the process of placing children in homes as apprentices or indentured servants. Brace borrowed this methodology and enhanced it by experimenting on children in New York.[15]

Another organization that utilized the "placing out" process was the Children's Mission to the Children of the Destitute in Boston, Massachusetts that was established in 1850 by John Earl Williams. This children's mission sent groups of thirty to forty destitute children by train to western New England and to the Midwest to be indentured to local farmers and merchants on a quarterly basis.[16] There were other organizations that had been practicing a similar method prior to the establishment of the CAS. The most obvious precedent to Brace's Emigration Plan was indentured servitude; the hidden theme of which one can find under the cover of the Orphan Train Movement.

The inaugural journey of the Orphan Train Movement occurred by boat on September 28, 1854. The journey originated in Albany, New York carrying forty-six boys and girls from seven to fifteen years old. The movement took the children to

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[14] O'Connor, *Orphan Trains*, 94.

[15] Rebecca S. Trammell, "Orphan Train Myths and Legal Reality," *Modern American* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 3-13, accessed May 13, 2019, https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/moderam5&i=69.

[16] O'Connor, *Orphan Trains*, 94.

Dowagiac, Michigan where townspeople met them at the town's port. Later, the journey would be made by train as it was the most cost effective and efficient mode available to transport large groups of children at a time. Prior to transporting the children to a Midwestern town, Brace and CAS agents would solicit interested families by writing letters that appealed to their responsibility as good Christians to care for God's neglected deserted children who needed them, and also by using scare tactics to warn the families that destitute children would become a menace to society if left on the streets.[17] In addition to sending letters, the CAS ran advertisements soliciting homes for the children. The advertisements would run in the local papers of the towns where the children would arrive based upon a published schedule. The advertisements stated when the children would be available in a specific city and provided descriptions of the children with attractive attributes such as "self-sufficient" and "useful."[18] An example of the wording of an advertisement for an upcoming trip reads:

> The object of the coming of these children is to find homes in your midst, especially among farmers, where they may enjoy a happy and wholesome family life, where kind care, good example of moral training will fit them for life of self-support and usefulness. They come under the auspices of the New York Children's Aid Society, by whom they have been tested and found to be well-meaning and willing boys and girls. The conditions are that these children shall be properly clothed, treated as members of the family, given proper school advantages and remain in the family until they are eighteen years of age. At the expiration of the time specified it is hoped that arrangements can be made whereby they may be able to remain in the family indefinitely. The Society retains the right to remove a child at any time for just cause, and agrees to remove any found unsatisfactory after being notified.[19]

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[17] O'Connor, *Orphan Trains*, 85.

[18] "West by Orphan Train: A Documentary," directed by Clark Kidder and Colleen Krantz, aired December 14, 2014, Iowa Public Television.

[19] Clarke, *Orphan Trains and Their Precious Cargo*, 17.

Prior to their impending arrival in the scheduled town, the children would be made presentable; the girls were dressed in nice dresses and the boys were dressed in suits. The children would be bathed and groomed prior to their departure from New York. Upon arrival to the scheduled train stop, townspeople who were interested in obtaining a child and those who were simply interested in seeing the children out of sheer curiosity would meet the children. The children would be placed on display to be viewed by everyone. Some were asked questions, some were asked to perform and others, namely boys, were told to show "some form of intelligence."[20] If the family liked a particular child, they were instructed to complete an application. Upon its completion, a local selection committee who would make a final determination for placement would review the application.

Requests for sibling groups were not approved according to CAS' policy that reasoned that siblings would compete for attention thus creating conflict in their new family setting. Children who were selected and approved for placement with a new family were taken immediately to the family's home. Children who were not selected were left to feel rejected and abandoned once again; and they were loaded on the train headed to the next stop where they would hopefully be selected. Any children who were not selected would be returned to New York.

The placing out process is reminiscent of the one used to select slaves and indentured servants who were unwillingly snatched from their hometowns and loaded upon a ship to be 'placed out' to a faraway port city. Upon arrival, they too were put on display to show their potential for field work or breeding and asked to perform in song or dance. It appears that the only difference in the two processes was the cost—slaves were

[20] Kidder and Krantz, "West by Orphan Train: A Documentary."

sold as property and required a payment from the buyer to the seller, while CAS children were given away for free.

A glance at the magnitude of the child welfare problem in the state of New York shows that between 1853 and 1930, approximately 150,000 children were placed into the city's care.[21] After its initial run with forty-six children, the number of children who were on the Orphan Train's second journey quadrupled, and steadily increased over the years. Children were sent in groups of twenty-five to one hundred on trains with an agent, making stops along the way where a family who wanted a child or needed extra help on their farm might choose them.

Charles Brace viewed the need to place poor and neglected children into Midwestern homes as an economic venture founded on an equation of supply and demand. In his memoir, *Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Among Them,* Brace wrote "The demand for labor on this land is beyond any present supply."[22] Therefore, if children were physically capable of working and needed a home, and if farmers needed workers, the equation could be easily solved; it was a win-win situation for both parties. The Orphan Train distributed children to over thirty states. By 1910, states receiving orphan train children were as listed in Table 3.[23] At the conclusion of its run in 1929, the Orphan Train had removed approximately 200,000 children from New York, Illinois, and other cities over its seventy-five-year history.[24]

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[21] Smith and Holguin, *History of Child Welfare*, 175.

[22] Brace, *Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' among Them,* 225.

[23] Kidder and Krantz, "West by Orphan Train: A Documentary."

[24] Trammell, "Orphan Train Myths and Legal Reality," 3-13.

Table 3. Number of children placed by state

City	Number of Children Received
New York	33,053
Illinois	9,172
Ohio	7,272
Iowa	6,675
Missouri	6,088
Michigan	5,326
New Jersey	4,977
Kansas	4,150
Indiana	3,955
Nebraska	3,442

In addition to the Orphan Train, CAS offered a variety of programs with the expressed mission of improving the lives of poor children. They provided lodging houses for working boys and classes for handicapped children. Brace partnered with other child saving organizations to remove children, labeled as genetically inferior as a result of their immigrant heritage from the streets, and placed them in other states. One such organization was the Sisters of Charity from the New York Foundling Hospital. This organization indentured Catholic children and arranged placements for them with Catholic families in Arkansas under the guidance of local priests.

Catholic families requested children based on their personal preferences such as skin color, hair color, and gender.[25] Both CAS and the Sisters of Charity resettled children out of the city and into the country. Children were promised a better life in a real home on a farm, and parents were persuaded to relinquish their parental responsibilities to the CAS because their children deserved a better life. Brace believed that the right environment would change a child's life from bad to good.

[25] Johnson, Mary Ellen. *Journeys of Hope: Orphan Train Riders, Their Own Stories* (Springdale, AR: Orphan Train Heritage Society of America, 1999).

On the surface, this theory appears as a charitable gesture, yet upon a closer look one could surmise that the organization's goal was to rid the city of the inferior races. The placing out of the children would be a benefit to all. The middle-and upper-class residents would have a safe place to live, and not live in fear of robbery or rioting by vagrant children. The parents of the children would benefit by not having the expense of taking care of their children. They would have the assurance of their children living a better life—with another family. The benefit for the children would be the opportunity to have a brand-new life where they would live in a new home with a morally respectable, loving family and an opportunity to attend a good school. The receiving Midwestern family would benefit from taking in an orphan by acquiring additional laborers to work on their farms.

The benefits promised did not manifest as a reality for all of the children 'placed out' of their hometowns and into Midwestern homes. Siblings were separated and, in some cases, never to be seen again. Children received infrequent visits from CAS agents in that they would receive one or two visits per year. Parents who willingly placed their children in the CAS's care were unable to locate their children. As the resettlement cities urbanized, they began to experience their own problems with childcare and child placement needs. This resulted in laws prohibiting the intake of out-of-state children and lessening the need for children from the Orphan Train.[26]

In conclusion, there is no definite proof that Orphan Train Movement and Brace's CAS had a significant impact on New York's child welfare system, nor is there significant data that suggests that the movement placed more children than the public agencies. Authors have opposing views regarding the Orphan Train's impact on the

[26] Trammell, "Orphan Train Myths and Legal Reality," 3-13.

overall reformation of child welfare practices. Some authors suggest that there were several social programs already in existence in the 1850s that addressed the welfare of children and that the Orphan Train was not the sole organization. The attention drawn towards the Orphan Train movement may have had a larger reach due to its multi-state recruitment campaigns. Advocates of the movement view the Orphan Train and the Children's Aid Society as the answer to the city's problems. These neglected and homeless children made the city streets unsafe for its middle and upper-class residents; and irresponsible parents who were unable to properly care for their children.

Although the quantitative effects of the impact that the Orphan Train movement had on the child welfare practice as a whole are debatable, what is evident is the increased awareness it facilitated. The continual demand for homes for poor children must have raised the awareness of the plight of orphaned children over a seventy-five-year period and increased the number of charitable and child welfare organizations. These organizations focused on advocacy and programs that would help families prevent children from being placed out of the home.

The need for the Orphan Train's placing out services decreased as states implemented better child welfare practices and began hiring social workers to work with families to keep them together. Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Texas and Mississippi implemented improved child welfare practices and passed new adoption laws.[27] Charities created programs to help poor and destitute families. The Children's Aid Society continued to provide services to improve the lives of children after the disbandment of the orphan train.

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[27] Trammell, "Orphan Train Myths and Legal Reality," 3-13.

In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt convened the first White House Conference on Children, which directed state and federal bodies to implement programs designed to aid destitute children and their families. More than two hundred persons attended. The conference emphasized the harm children experienced at institutional facilities. The also conference reinforced the importance of family and home life, stating that "[home] life is the highest and finest product of civilization. It is the great molding force of mind and Children should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons."[28] The White House Conference on Children would continue on a decennial basis.[29] President Roosevelt's initial conference facilitated proposed legislation to create the Federal Children's Bureau. In a message to Congress urging the passing of the Children's Bureau bill, Roosevelt wrote:

> There are few things more vital to the welfare of the nation than accurate and dependable knowledge of the best methods of dealing with children, especially with those who are in one way or another handicapped by misfortune; and in the absence of such knowledge each community is left to work out its own problem without being able to learn of and profit by the success or failure of other communities along the same lines of endeavor.[30]

Legislation passed that established the Children's Bureau in 1912 by President Taft. The Children's Bureau was the first federal agency in the United States government dedicated to the welfare of children. The agency's mission was to improve the welfare of children and families throughout the nation.

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[28] "The History of White House Conferences on Children and Youth," Child Welfare League of America, 2009, accessed May 13, 2019, http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/whitehouseconfhistory.pdf.

[29] Dean Roberts, "Highlights of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth," *American Journal of Public Health* 41, no. 1 (January 1, 1951): 96-99, accessed May 13, 2019, https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/pdf/10.2105/AJPH.41.1.96.

[30] "The History of White House Conferences on Children and Youth," Child Welfare League of America, accessed May 13, 2019, http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/whitehouseconfhistory.pdf.

Historically speaking, the Church's response to the child welfare problem has usually been demonstrated by churches with Caucasian congregants. In this chapter, references to the "Church" connotes the universal or collective church, and not a specific church. This population willingly fosters and adopts children whose racial identities are different than their own for various reasons. The rationale behind their charitable actions may include sheer goodwill, a desire to have a child, or a compulsion to save poor children. This does not imply that members of black churches are not concerned about the plight of vulnerable children in their communities. Their response, historically, has been to provide financial support to a charitable or missionary organization involved in helping the plight of these children.

The number of black churches that are rolling up their sleeves and creating programs to address the socioeconomic issues that impact their communities are few and far between. The types of programs needed are those that address issues within the urban community such as unemployment, drugs, housing, and gangs, just to name a few. The mitigating factor preventing black churches from addressing the problems of poverty and disenfranchisement that plague the black community is the lack of an abundance of financial resources. However, there are some predominately black churches within white denominations that have developed programs to support foster children, youth and their families. Prior to closing its doors in 2018, the Lincoln Congregational Temple of the United Church of Christ in Washington, D.C. ran the 'Adopt-A-Family Program' that provided non-financial support to distressed families in the city. Chicago's One Church, One Child program, sponsored by the Illinois Department of Social Services and an

interdenominational coalition of black churches and pastors encouraged congregants to adopt black children awaiting adoption.[31]

In the Book of Lamentations, the abandonment and neglect of the children was a result of the sins of the parents. In the mid-1850s, Charles Loring Brace also attributed the plight of some of the poor orphaned children to the sinful nature of the parents. Socioeconomic factors led to increased poverty that led some parents to either abandon their children or to place them in an orphanage. The harsh reality of unemployment and conditions similar to those which they tried to escape in their home countries faced the immigrants who came to the United States seeking a better life for themselves and their families. Children who were forced into homelessness took care of themselves by stealing, looting, begging, and participating in other undesirable activities as they struggled for existence. Brace saw this lifestyle as deplorable and a danger to society.

The need to improve the lives of children goes back to biblical times. The pericope selected to support the biblical foundation of this doctoral project from Lamentations, proves this point. In the text, Jeremiah implores Zion to pray to God for the lives of its children who have been left abandoned in the streets:

> Cry aloud to the Lord! O wall of daughter Zion! Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite! Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street (Lam. 2:18-29).

Despite the circumstances that prevent parents from providing the basic care and safety needs for their children, the children are innocent victims who deserve to have happy lives. They should not, in any circumstances, be left alone on the streets to struggle for

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[31] C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 340.

their survival. Charles Loring Brace said, “When a child of the streets stands before you in rags, with a tear-stained face, you cannot easily forget him. And yet, you are perplexed what to do. The human soul is difficult to interfere with. You hesitate how far you should go.”[32] The church bears the responsibility to respond the cries of the children who are at risk of abandonment. The mission of the collaborative network of faith-based organizations is to follow its soul and go as far as possible to save children from fainting from hunger at the head of every street.

[32] Kidder and Krantz, “West by Orphan Train: A Documentary.”

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The theological foundation of the Doctor of Ministry project will focus on the systematic tenets of liberation theology which includes a practical application of missiology. The project, aptly named Project iThrive, is designed to create a collaborative network of community faith-based organizations to provide a consistent support system to at-risk families and children. The term at-risk families, for this study, is defined as those families with children (ages zero to eighteen) who may be at risk of having a child removed from their home by the state's child welfare agency and placed into the foster care system.

Children who are removed from the family home have experienced one or more forms of child maltreatment at the hands of an adult. Child maltreatment includes but is not limited to neglect (emotional, educational, physical, and medical) and abuse (sexual, physical, and psychological). Despite the reason for the state agency's involvement with the family, a child's removal from the family home is an oppressive and traumatic experience; an experience from which a child may not recover. Oftentimes, children who enter into the foster care system are being groomed for other oppressive systems such as the juvenile justice and penal systems. They are prime candidates for the foster care to prison pipeline. Oppressed children are cheated out of a life they deserve where they can thrive and become productive citizens.

The immediate goals of the faith-based network are multifold: to keep the family unit intact, to reduce the number of children entering into the foster care system, and ultimately to prevent child oppression. The doctoral project begs the question: can the faith-based community problematize the oppression of children? The answer to this question is a resounding yes; and the basis of the answer is an orthopraxis founded on the doctrine of liberation theology.

A liberation theology does not exist simply in its doctrine alone. To say that one is committed to liberation theology is an empty commitment unless the commitment is put into practice. In order words, liberation theology includes an action to liberate those who are oppressed, to change oppressive contexts and to fight against the injustices that facilitate oppression. A precept of liberation theology orthopraxy is missiology; the mission of the church of Jesus Christ which responds to the poor, the disenfranchised, the left behind and left out with urgency.[1] "Under the pressures of time, hunger, repression, injustice, and suffering the theology of liberation has been born and continues to live."[2] The doctrine of liberation theology is an appropriate choice for this project as it aligns the historical foundation, the Orphan Train Movement, and the foundational biblical context of Lamentations 2:18-19 with a God who liberates the oppressed.

In the present context surrounding systems that serve as breeding grounds for child oppression, such as the foster care system, there is a dire need for a theology that addresses systematic oppression. There is a need for a theology that gets upfront and personal with those who are suffering and confronts, as opposed to accepts, the status

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[1] Craig L. Nessan, *Orthopraxis or Heresy: The North American Theological Response to Latin American Liberation Theology* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 119-121.

[2] Nessan, *Orthopraxis or Heresy,* 54.

quo. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) FY 2018 reports that approximately 687,345 children were served by the child welfare system, specifically, in foster care in the United States. As of September 30, 2018, there were approximately 437,283 children in foster care.[3] In Washington, D.C., there were a total of 858 children in the District of Columbia's foster care system in 2019. This number changes constantly as children are removed from their birth parents' homes on a daily basis; and also, as children achieve permanency through adoption or reunification with birth parents. While the statistics may provide an insight to the number of children in the foster care system, the statistics do not provide an insight into the impact the system had on the children. Nor do they provide a snapshot of the oppression children suffer as a result of their struggle with such hopeless conditions.

Liberation theology requires one to get involved with the victims of oppression. It requires a relationship with the poor, disenfranchised, marginalized and oppressed. It requires one to get involved in the liberation struggle. Liberation theology and the connected missiological orthopraxis requires knowledge that Christ is at the intersection of the Church and the child welfare system. The tenets of liberation theology will be examined and engaged in this theological foundations chapter to determine its relevance and applicability for use to liberate oppressed children.

The liberation theology movement originated from the Roman Catholic theology and was intended to liberate poor, suffering people from economic, social and political ills that resulted in an unjust oppressive context in Latin America. Its premise builds on

[3] U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Children's Bureau," Administration for Children and Families, accessed April 7, 2020, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb.

teachings of the Christian faith and practices as they relate to poor persons in their never-ending struggle to reach wholeness and challenges the Christian Church and their doctrine to take action. Authors attributed to the origination of liberation theology include Leonardo Boff, Clodovis Boff, Jon Sobrino, Oscar Romero, and Juan Luis Segundo. Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest, is considered to be the founding father of this liberal theological movement.

Liberation theology began as a reaction to the social injustices experienced by the disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed people in Latin America in the late sixties.[4] The challenge to the dominant white Christian doctrine was not only to provide a theological basis to deal with the injustices of oppressed persons, but to also provide a solution. It is no surprise that liberation theology was seen as a radical movement that greatly challenged the Roman Catholic Church because it scrutinized immoral practices and institutions that facilitated oppression. Liberation theology called into question the oppressive practices of the Church and dared the Church to take action against poverty and other systematic forces that oppressed its people.[5]

Gustavo Gutierrez and other supporters of liberation theology proffered that the "Catholic Church in Latin America belonged to the 'same class' as the oppressive regimes following the arrival of colonialism."[6] During the nineteenth century, Europe had an economic hold over Latin America and political alliances were established that

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[4] James V. Schall, *Liberation Theology in Latin America with Selected Essays and Documents* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1982), 36-37.

[5] George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth and Liberation Theology," *Journal of Religion* 63, no. 3 (1983): 247–263, accessed April 8, 2020, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/1203036.

[6] Laurens de Rooij and Joanildo Burity, "Liberation Theology," in *The Sage Encyclopedia of Economics and Society*, ed. Frederick F. Wherry and Juliet B. Schor (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2015), 1030.

allowed the rich and powerful to control the poor and powerless. Robert Brown states that during this time:

> The church became increasingly identified with the rich and powerful, who saw that religion was a good thing, useful in keeping the masses submissive through promises of an eternal reward in heaven if they made no trouble on earth. And it went hand in glove with a theory of the divine right of rulers over subjects – a European legacy that also brooked no uprisings from below and assured divine sanction for the status quo. It was a good arrangement for the rich, a good arrangement for the church, which became not only a church of the rich, but a rich church as well. It was a bad arrangement for the poor.[7]

In Latin America, the poor were an oppressed group who were reminded of their oppressive context economically, politically, socially and religiously. The ever-present Christian symbolism that served as that reminder was the crucifix on which they could see a bleeding Jesus Christ dying and suffering. It is important to note that the symbol of the crucifix is not designated to the nineteenth century in Latin America. The crucifix crosses international waters and continents and is present in homes and religious institutions throughout Africa, the Caribbean and the United States of America today. Yet, the message behind the crucifix is far from liberative. The message is more than the atonement of Jesus for the sins of the world. The message is also one of resignation and acceptance of suffering and death. To surmise that the oppressive symbolism of the crucifix and teachings of acquiescence, passivity and resignation were used in Latin America (while under European rule) by the rich to keep the masses docile, is not a great leap. A Eurocentric Catholic religion and orthodoxy permeated Latin America and appeared to be a religious ideology that widened the gap between the haves and the have

[7] Robert Brown, *Gustavo Gutierrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 4.

nots.[8] A new way of looking at the world and a break in the dominant white theology that misrepresented Christian theology was needed. A theology that included, and did not exclude, a Gospel message for the poor, the disenfranchised, the left behind, and the marginalized was desperately needed; a theology that liberated and did not oppress.

The world required a theological foundation that addressed the biblical rights of the oppressed. In his book entitled *When Theology Listens to the Poor*, Leonardo Boff states that, "The Bible never speaks of human rights. The rights spoken of in the Bible belong to the orphan, the widow, the pauper, the immigrant, and the alien. There is no sidestepping the fact that biblical rights, especially in the Prophets, the Wisdom literature, and the New Testament, are the rights of the oppressed."[9] Psalm 146:5-9 postulates:

> Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

Proverbs 14:3 states that, "Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him" (Pr. 14:3). Psalm 72:12-14 provides further support where it states, "For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence, he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight."

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[8] "Religion in Latin America: Widespread Change in a Historically Catholic Region," Pew Research Center, November 13, 2014, 87-94, accessed April 8, 2020, https://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/.

[9] Leonardo Boff, *When Theology Listens to the Poor* (San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1988), 58-59.

Liberation theology is the first major theological movement to have its origin in the third world in a modern period. This elevates it to monumental significance for the entire history of theology and implies that theology can no longer be confined to the walls of the seminary nor in one part of the world. The social location for the "doing" of theology shifted dramatically to the communities of the poor, those seeking to cast off the shackles of poverty and oppressive social structures.[10]

Gustavo Gutierrez indicates that the Gospel of Jesus is not only 'liberation from' (something negative), but it includes a positive counterpart which is liberation 'for.' Gutierrez describes three levels of liberation with corresponding counterparts. The first level is liberation from unjust social structures to liberation for participation in creating a just society. The second level is liberation from fate to liberation for responsible action; and the third level is liberation from sin and guilt to liberation for a grace-filled life.[11] These three levels correspond to the sixth chapter, eight verse of Micah which states, "And what does the Lord require of you but to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with God." The 'doing' of liberation theology results in the removal of oppressive structures that promote injustice and hinder people from reaching their fullest potential, the removal of preconceived notions about a person's fate; and the removal of doubt that salvation is available by God.

The focal population of Project iThrive is at-risk children in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. These are children who live in the parental home and experienced a form of child maltreatment at the hands of an adult. These children are also at-risk of

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[10] Robert Brown, *Gustavo Gutierrez: An Introduction to Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 56-57.

[11] Brown, *Gustavo Gutierrez*.

being removed from their home and placed into foster care temporarily or permanently. In Washington, D.C., the majority of families who are involved with the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) have a low to moderately-low level of household income and reside in neighborhoods that are impacted by drugs, crimes or both. Over eighty percent of the racial composition is African American.

A theology of liberation is appropriate for Project iThrive's themes of liberating children from oppression (socially, spiritually, mentally, physically), preventing children from being oppressed (through systems, parents, etc.) and directs the work that the Church (faith-based network) will do. The role of the church is to participate in the process of liberation by coming together across denominational lines to respond to the needs of the children. In his book entitled, *When Theology Listens to the Poor*, Boff asks a question that is still relevant today, "Who can remain indifferent to the cry of the oppressed for bread and liberation?" The iThrive collaboration of faith-based institutions will not remain indifferent. Churches have a long track record of opposing liberation struggles, becoming oppressive factions themselves. However, liberation theology requires the church to have a missional orthopraxy by upholding Jesus' mission statement found in the fourth chapter of the Book of Luke, verses eighteen and nineteen, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk. 4:18-19).

The church's role is to be ambassadors of Christ and go beyond missiological theory and include practice in its mission statement. In other words, the church must not only learn or think missiologically, the church must practice, closing the gap between

theory and praxis. Responding to the mission of God (the Missio Dei) requires the church to love God's people as God loves them and to care for them, especially the orphan and the widow. This theocentric requirement is the basis for liberation theology's key tenet, the preferential option for the poor. It is modeled after Jesus and his love for the poor. However, it is necessary to first define the term poor. Who are the poor? For this study, the poor does not simply refer to one's economic status. It refers to those persons who are marginalized, oppressed or disregarded by society. Persons who seemingly have no rights.

In addition to identifying the poor, it is also necessary to define or redefine the term poverty because there is a conflict between the tenets of liberation theology and scripture. The Bible speaks of the beauty of poverty, yet in Latin America, those who were poor could not speak of the beauty of poverty while living with its dehumanizing affects. How can one glamorize poverty when it causes suffering and despair? How can one find God in poverty when the church is aligned with tyrannical governments, repressive militaries and wealthy oligarchies? The Latin American theologians needed a new way of thinking about the poor and poverty in order to align their historical religious traditions with a gospel of hope and the promise of freedom in the present realities that surround them. In 1968, several Catholic bishops gathered together at a conference in Medellin, Columbia to resolve this dialectical challenge, and created the preferential option for the poor to keep the longstanding orthodoxy of poverty while also recognizing its dehumanizing affects.[12]

The preferential option for the poor defines three types of poverty: material, spiritual, and voluntary poverty. Gutierrez considered material poverty to be evil that

[12] Brown, *Gustavo*, 56-57.

should be avoided at all costs. The lack of material needs, and the basic standard of human dignity is considered to be a violation of God's will for the human person. Poverty is not something to be endured or a way in which one can attain virtue. It is something that should be struggled against and removed from the world.[13]

Contrary to and separate from material poverty is spiritual poverty. Spiritual poverty is an attitude of dependence on God, and an openness towards the will of God for one's life and society.[14] To not have a dependence on God, and to think God is not needed is considered to be a sin. Throughout the Old Testament, there are many examples of prideful kings who did not defer to God to govern their lives. Unfortunately, such willful disregard resulted in their ruination.

The third type of poverty defined in the option for the poor is voluntary poverty. This type of poverty stands in the gap of material poverty and spiritual poverty. Voluntary poverty is an act of solidarity in which people of faith come together to fight against social injustices. Voluntary poverty is the essence of liberation theology because it makes a commitment to the poor and allows the believer to opt-in to making a change in society.[15] Voluntary theology models the life of Jesus and reflects on Jesus' kenosis [recorded in the second chapter of Philippians, verse seven] when he gave up himself to dwell on earth with the poor and oppressed in community and to challenge the feudal systems that oppressed people.

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[13] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. and ed. Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 57.

[14] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 57.

[15] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, 57.

The concept of voluntary poverty is applicable for the iThrive Project's faith-based network. Church leaders from various faiths will cross denominational lines to come together to solve a common problem that affects their communities. The intrinsic principle of voluntary poverty is not to embrace the concept of poverty and oppression and its dehumanizing effect on life; but to embrace the poor and oppressed. Gutierrez writes, "Christians have not done enough in this area of conversion to the neighbor, to social justice, to history. They have not perceived clearly enough yet that to know God is to do justice. They have yet to tread the path that will lead them to seek effectively the peace of the Lord in the heart of social struggle."[16]

Children are an inherently oppressed group due to their lack of independence, knowledge and maturity. They are subjected to the destiny set for them by their parents. Yet they too need a theology that speaks to their context and champions their biblical rights to which Leonardo Boff says they are entitled. The children who were either orphaned or taken from their homes as a part of the Orphan Train Movement and moved from New York City to the Midwest had no rights. They had no input into the decisions that were made for them under the guise of a Christian, Reverend Charles Brace, who played God and professed to know what was best for God's children. Children were sent in groups of twenty-five to one hundred on trains with an agent that made stops along the way.[17] The goal was to connect the children with a family who wanted a child(ren) or needed extra help on their farm. Charles Brace viewed the need to place poor and neglected children into Midwestern homes as an economic venture founded on an

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[16] Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* 57.

[17] Charles Loring Brace, *Gesta Christ: Or, a History of Humane Progress under Christianity* (New York, NY: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1882).

equation of supply and demand. Like the Latin Americans, children living in a state of oppression require exposure to a faith that generates hope and freedom even if they are unable to articulate the injustices that befall them.

The adaption and shaping of Latin America's liberation theology set the stage for the creation of other types of liberation theologies throughout the years. These theologies were built on the premise of freedom for a particular oppressed group with an enhanced platform based upon the group's historical injustices and struggles. Feminist theology stresses the struggle against the oppression of women. Christian feminists claim that Jesus came to liberate women from oppression. Queer theology stresses struggle against oppression for the LGBTQI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex) community. LGBTQI persons who are Christians have made Jesus Christ their liberator as they fight for dignity and acceptance in what they believe to be a homophobic society.[18]

Another theology that is closely aligned with liberation theology and could be relevant for this doctoral project is black theology. Black theology was birthed out of a need to address the struggles and frustrations of African American Christians who had no place in the white religion that was inflicted upon them. It was impossible to believe in a religion with a white God who justified the white master's enslavement and inhumane treatment of black people. The acceptance of a God who resembled the oppressor presented a conflict with the Messiah who, in Luke 4:18-19, proclaimed to free the oppressed.

As African Americans continued to fight for freedom from the oppression caused by the aftermath of slavery and the overt racism that plagued their lives, they required a

[18] de Rooij and Burity, "Liberation Theology," 1029-1030.

theology that spoke to their oppression and their struggles, in their context. As with the Latin Americans who needed a liberating theology that broke the chains of European colonialism, the African Americans needed a theology that featured a God who understood their struggles and joined them in their fight for liberation. They needed prayers that spoke to their deliverance and biblical teachings that included their history.

The late black theology pioneer James H. Cone wrote:

> The appearance of black theology on the American scene then is due primarily to the failure of white religionists to relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white racist society. It arises from the need of blacks to liberate themselves from white oppression. Black theology is a theology of liberation because it is a theology which arises from an identification with the oppressed blacks of America, seeking to interpret the gospel of Jesus in the light of the black condition. It believes that the liberation of the black community *is* God's liberation.[19]

Black theology is a theology for the black community, the black condition and the black context. It is a Christian theology that affirms the God in Christ who is undeniably on the side of the oppressed, poor, marginalized and disenfranchised. The roots of black theology reflect on a time when black clergy members realized that killing slave masters was doing the work of God and a time when black clergy refused to accept the racist white church as the gospel of God. As they studied scripture, they understood that:

> The God who demanded their devotion, and from whom came the spirit that infused their secret meetings and possessed their souls and bodies in the ecstasy of worship, was not the God of the slave master, with his whip and gun, nor the God of the plantation preacher with his segregated services and injunctions to servility and blind obedience.[20]

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[19] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 5.

[20] Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of African Americans* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 32-33.

The establishment of black churches such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Christian Methodist Church and Baptist Churches offer a visible manifestation of black theology.[21] Upon reviewing the tenets of liberation theology and black liberation theology, it is easy to validate their similar themes of freedom for the oppressed. Both theologies provide a departure from a white oppressive theology where the justification for oppression is made either symbolically through religious orthopraxis or through religious ideology. Each, in its own way, sees Jesus Christ as the liberator of victims from every type of oppression in existence. James Cone introduced liberation theology as a theology of Christianity and the basis for Christian doctrine. He states:

> Christian theology is a theology of liberation. It is a rational study of the being of God in the world in light of the existential situation of an oppressed community, relating the forces of liberation to the essence of the gospel, which is Jesus Christ. This means that its sole reason for existence is to put into ordered speech the meaning of God's activity in the world, so that the community of the oppressed will recognize that its inner thrust for liberation is not only *consistent with* the gospel but *is* the gospel of Jesus Christ.[22]

The liberation theology of the Latin American theologians challenges the Church to a call to action to first be Christian and second, to practice Christianity. Liberation theology sees God on the side of the poor, oppressed, weak, and needy. Further, liberation theology demands Christians to fight against oppression and any other injustices against God's people. From this viewpoint, one must not simply recognize the oppressed, one must find the reason for the oppression and rally against it. Black theology caters to the black experience and provides a God for African Americans who were oppressed by social, economic, political and religious injustices – from slavery to present day. Black

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[21] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 28.

[22] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 1.

theology promotes a God for the one who is oppressed because the one being oppressed is Christian, but not for the oppressor because he is controlled by Satan.

On the surface, both of the theologies discussed in this chapter offers a theological basis for the iThrive doctoral project. However, while they both champion the oppressed, per se, the oppressed group(s) targeted in these theologies do not directly include or speak to children. Theology must reference the problem of child maltreatment and oppression. Theology must reference the suffering and disenfranchisement of children.

A child liberation theology is needed that provides a hermeneutic for children of all ethnicities, genders, colors, and economic status. Children need a theology of their own that crosses geographical borders and reaches into third world countries that are still facing the residual effects of the oppression created as a result of the exploitation by First and Second World countries. In the United States of America's urban streets such as Washington, D.C., children who are left out on the streets to die are in desperate need of a theology that introduces them to a God who loves them and gives them hope. Most importantly, children need a Jesus who can understand them in their childhood struggles.

A liberation theology for children teaches children about a Christ who, as a child, experienced a less than desirable life. Jesus Christ was born as a fatherless child in an economically challenged city, Galilee. To assume that Jesus lived in a loving, problem-free home with parents who adored him is unreasonable. Jesus' mother was a teenager, his stepfather was likely struggling with the fact that Jesus was not his biological child. Jesus was abandoned by his parents in Jerusalem for three days.

Liberation theology is not a new theology. It was present in biblical times during the enslavement of Israelites by Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Their captivity, struggles and

bondage facilitated an oppressive context that can be found in the history of slavery. The Israelites were in dire need of liberation and deliverance by a God who heard the cries of the oppressed.

In liberation theology, God is the liberator of the oppressed. “Father of orphans, defender of widows, such is God in [God’s] holy dwelling; God gives the lonely a permanent home, makes prisoners happy by setting them free, but rebels must live in an arid land” (Ps. 68:5-6). Orphans and widows are amongst the least privileged in the Bible, but God has a special concern for them. God is the God of the dispossessed and God challenges Christians by their actions in this case. Deuteronomy chapter 24:17-18 provides an instruction to not deprive an orphan of justice nor cause harm to a widow, and to remember the Lord’s redemption of his people from slavery.

The goal of the doctoral project’s collaborative network is two-fold: to raise the faith-based institution’s awareness of struggles of the people in their communities and to get them involved in the solution. If a child is facing abandonment, neglect or abuse, a member of the network will intervene and help that family by reaching out to the family to assess its needs and providing the necessary resources. Intervention prior to a negative action prevents the occurrence of irreversible trauma to the child. When the parents cry out for the lives of their children, just as Jerusalem was implored to do, they will have the assurance of hope in the church. The lives of the children can be spared, and they too can find hope in the church of Jesus Christ. A liberation theology for children gives hope to the fatherless, motherless, maltreated, abused and neglected child by introducing them to the father of Jesus the Son of God. The divine favor of the unworthy can rest in the word of God.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

This chapter will introduce the interdisciplinary field of social work and the systems theory to the doctoral project. Additionally, the chapter will look at the juxtaposition on the project's three foundational papers in an effort to bring about a collaborative approach to the problem of child oppression. To effectively develop a collaborative program aimed to address the needs of children and help them thrive in their societal context, an exploration into social work and, specifically, the systems theory will prove beneficial.

Over the past few years, the practice of social work has transitioned from a psychological-style practice where the case or social worker's approach consisted of therapy sessions to 'fix' the client, to a more strength-based collaborative approach where the worker works 'with' the client and his context to determine the best solution for everyone involved. With this collaborative approach, the solution is client-centric in that it focuses on what is best for the client and includes the positive elements that surround him in the solution. Despite the negative issues surrounding the client's family that have led to the client's involvement with the child welfare agency, it is crucial that the family is engaged in a way that reflects its strengths. One prerequisite of a strength-based collaborative approach is the social work practitioner's ability to develop a positive relationship with the client and the client's family and her ability to engage the systems

within the client's immediate context. The interdisciplinary foundation of the doctoral project is centralized in the field of social work.

According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), social work is a helping profession. National Association of Social Workers explains that "The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet basic and complex needs of all people, with a particular focus on those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty."[1] Carol H. Meyer and Mark A. Mattaini write, "The purpose of social work is to enhance adaptations among clients (whether they are individuals, families, communities, or other entities) and the systems within which the clients are embedded—the environment. A system is an organized entity that exists and adapts over time."[2]

Social work is a complex discipline that encompasses many methodologies, interests, and practices. The complexities of this discipline are due in large part to its dual focus on the individual and his context, with the express purpose of improving both. Social work's scope is far-reaching, spanning from attention to the individual, family, group, and community to the arena of social policy.[3] Those who practice the social work discipline wear multiple hats and are required to understand the unique needs of their clients and their environment while at the same time find a way to effectively meet those needs. In order to better the lives of oppressed, vulnerable individuals, a social worker must perform an assessment of the individual's current situation to determine the best

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[1] "Why Choose the Social Work Profession?" National Association of Social Workers, accessed March 11, 2020, https://www.socialworkers.org/Careers/Career-Center/Explore-Social-Work/Why-Choose-the-Social-Work-Profession.

[2] Carol H. Meyer and Mark A. Mattaini, *The Foundations of Social Work Practice* (Washington, DC: National Association of Social Workers Press, 1995), 1.

[3] Carol H. Meyer, introduction to *The Foundations of Social Work Practice*, ix.

outcomes available for the individual, his family, and community. Social work practitioners work with adults and children of various economic and social classes, racial and ethnic groups, cultures, and gender identities in hospitals, clinics, social welfare agencies, schools, institutions, communities and on the streets. They serve as social justice advocates who fight against societal ills that result in the oppression of vulnerable populations such as children. Social work touches the lives of people every day and strives to better the lives of individuals and the society in which they live. Social workers stand on the precipice of life and death, making decisions for their clients that will determine their future.

The interdisciplinary theory that contributes to the project is known as general systems theory (interchangeably referred to as systems theory). This theory was popularized by German-Canadian biologist and philosopher Ludwig von Bertalanffy, who also made important contributions to a variety of fields including psychology, psychiatry, sociology, history, cybernetics, and philosophy.[4] Von Bertalanffy saw the world as a "great organization, hierarchically structured into interactive systems."[5] He surmised that a general systems theory would work across all disciplines as it related to the general systematic processes and the underlying laws of society.[6] A biologist himself, von Bertalanffy applied biological systems theories to the social world and argued that concepts of systems were relevant to the human services professions.[7] Contrary to

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[4] Ludwig von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: George Brazille, Inc., 2015), xi.

[5] von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory*, xi.

[6] von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory*, xii.

[7] Karen Healy, *Social Work Theories in Context: Creating Frameworks for Practice,* 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 117.

behaviorists, he did not see human beings as 'reactive automatons' but as individuals with 'active personality systems.'[8] Karen Healy states:

> By drawing attention to the *transactions* between the individual and their social environment, von Bertalanffy proposed that an individual's mental health can only be understood in relation to whether the individual has 'an integrated framework consistent within the given cultural framework'; in other words, from a general systems perspective, mental health challenges are considered to be produced through the exchange between the individual and their cultural environment rather than arising primarily from the individual psyche.[9]

Von Bertalanffy's approach was a radical departure from the norm, as the focus had for years been on psychoanalyzing by bringing up an individual's past instead of focusing on current conflicts, social and psychological reintegration, and orientation towards future goals.[10]

General systems theory is a social work theory based on the scientific premise of the wholeness of interconnected variables. Early proponents of the theory welcomed its scientific basis due to its potential to provide scientific credibility to the social work profession while at the same time developing an integrated theoretical framework that would capture the central elements of the social work practice in all its forms.[11] Carol H. Meyer describes the science of wholeness as it relates to general systems theory as "an organizing conceptual framework in which many disparate elements are integrated into a synthetic view and fall into place. That is, if one factor in the case is touched by an action

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[8] von Bertalanffy, *General Systems Theory*, 207.

[9] Healy, *Social Work Theories in Context*, 117.

[10] Healy, *Social Work Theories in Context*, 118.

[11] Healy, *Social Work Theories in Context*, 117.

or an event, another factor responds because the two factors are systemically connected."[12]

The impetus of the iThrive project is the negative impact and trauma children experience when they are removed from their homes and placed into the foster care system. A child's removal from the family home, regardless of the reason for the removal, can have a lifelong traumatic effect on a child. The magnitude of the trauma, in some cases, resembles post-traumatic stress disorder and can present itself in children as a behavioral issue, severe depression, a personality disorder, or worse. The child's removal affects not only the child but also his parents, siblings, friends, and community.

When children are removed from the care of their parent(s), they are placed into the care of the state's child welfare agency and oftentimes remain in foster care until they can safely return home to their parents, are placed into kinship care, or are adopted. Their fate is coordinated by one of the child welfare agency's social workers who must determine how best to help the child and the family with the available resources and support.

The iThrive project is founded upon themes of liberating children from oppression (socially, spiritually, mentally, physically) and preventing children from being oppressed (through systems, parents, or other means). Its mission is to disrupt the foster care system to juvenile justice system pipeline by preventing children from being removed from their homes and placed into the foster care system. By focusing on the prevention aspect of child oppression and or child trauma, the project must

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[12] Carol H. Meyer, "The Ecosystems Perspective," in *The Foundations of Social Work Practice*, 19.

collaboratively work with the family, child, and community in which the child lives to effectuate liberation.

Systems theory looks at the interconnectedness of people and their environments and suggests that they comprise a holistic system with a reciprocal effect. If this interconnectivity is viewed as an ecosystem comprised of children, their parents, and communities, the connection can be seen. For example, a child (client) is connected to his parent(s), sibling(s), and other close family member(s). The child lives in a neighborhood within a community that includes schools, churches or other religious institutions, community centers, medical professionals, and law enforcement. All of these variables are connected to the child as subsystems that are part of a larger interactive ecosystem. When a child suffers maltreatment or neglect, the impact of the child's maltreatment affects the ecosystem. If the child is of school age, the child may have multiple absences at school which may result in failing grades. If the child's maltreatment presents itself in inappropriate or aggressive behavior, the child may hurt other children in the school or community. The child's behavior may also result in admittance into a residential group home or a juvenile detention center.

The goal of Project iThrive is to become part of an ecosystem that engages with the social worker to provide an intervention for the child and family in the community. An ecosystem, a term that is comprised of ecology and general systems theory, is a framework that contains disparate variables that become integrated as a whole.[13] When applied to general systems theory, the variables of the ecosystem of a social work case exhibit certain systemic properties and demonstrate reciprocal responses when enclosed

[13] Edgar H. Auerswald, "Interdisciplinary Versus Ecological Approach," *Family Process* 7, no. 2 (September 1968): 202-215.

within a boundary (as in an ecomap).[14] In an ecosystem, the interconnectedness of the elements of a child or client's social work case is clearly visible. The elements that are connected to the child such as family, community, school, friends, abuse, and drugs can be depicted on an ecomap and provide a holistic view of the child's context. Two examples of ecomaps are shown below:

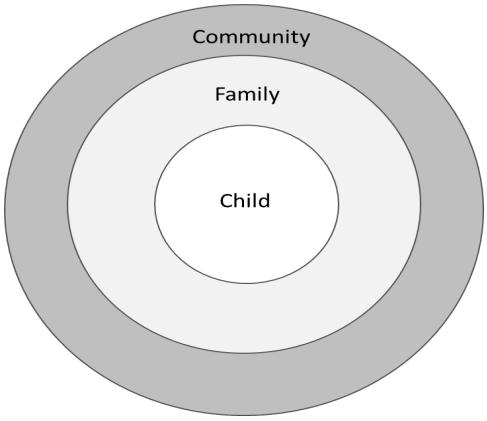

Figure 1. Ecomap 1

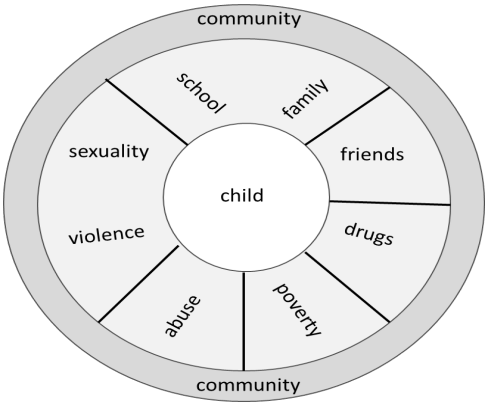

Figure 2. Ecomap 2

The first ecomap shows the relationship between the child, the child's family, and the community in which they live. The child is at the center of the map within the elements in their context or system. The second ecomap depicts the child and the

[14] Meyer, "The Ecosystems Perspective," 19.

elements that are affected within the community system. The connectedness of the system provides a holistic view of a social worker's case and shapes the way in which the worker approaches a solution. It is evident that the child is embedded within an environment or context that must be understood in order to understand the child and the issues he faces. "Because no person can be understood apart from his or her defining social context, the ecomaps present a *field* of elements in which a person is embedded."[15] In essence, the faith-based institutions that join iThrive will not become social workers, but they will use social work best practices and theories to prevent children from being oppressed.

Social workers are trained to recognize that all parts of any system are interrelated, interconnected, and interdependent; therefore, it is imperative to take into account the influence of various systems and subsystems on client functioning.[16] According to the NASW, "Systems theories involve concepts that emphasize reciprocal relationships between the elements that constitute a whole. These concepts also focus on the relationships among individuals, groups, organizations or communities and mutually influencing factors in the environment."[17] In looking at Figure 2, one can see the interconnectivity of the variables or elements within the system. When an intervention occurs within the system, the variables will be impacted resulting in a desirable outcome. For example, if a child becomes more involved in extracurricular activities at school, the child may be less inclined to get involved in the drug scene that is present in his

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[15] Meyer, "The Ecosystems Perspective," 18.

[16] Dan Andreae, *General Systems Theory: Contributions to Social Work Theory and Practice in Social Work Treatment: Interlocking Theoretical Approaches*, 5th ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2011), 242.

[17] National Association of Social Workers, "Standards and Indicators for Cultural Competence in Social Work Practice" (Washington, DC: NASW Press, 2015), 19.

neighborhood. Conversely, if a child is struggling with school does not get help and decides to skip school, the drug scene may become more attractive to him; thereby, increasing the impact it has on the community.

To better understand the impact that interdependent systems have on a child's development, it is necessary to review Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems model[18] which consists of interdependent systems that describe how a person (child) interacts with their environment:

1. *Microsystem* is the child's immediate environment such as family, classmates, and neighbors.

2. *Mesosystem* is the interaction and relationships between the different elements of the microsystem which effect the child.

3. *Exosystem* is comprised of the elements of the child's context which indirectly affect them.

4. *Macrosystem* is the wider societal context which has an impact on the child's microsystem and determines the cultural and socio-economic context in which the child develops.[19]

To further understand general systems theory, it is necessary to consider five concepts—transaction, homeostasis, entropy, equifinality, and feedback—that are key to its application. The concepts are described below.

This first concept is the transaction between a person and his environment; and it is central to the general systems theory. A social worker's responsibility includes understanding the transactions between the client and his environment in order to facilitate change in the transaction. William Gordon states, "Focusing on transactions, social workers seek to analyze the inputs from individual or environment and then

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[18] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 89.

[19] Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development*, 89.

throughputs from the organism to the environment and from the environment to organism."[20] A transactional analysis would inform the social worker as to how elements of the environment provoke and sustain the issues the client is facing and allow the social worker to determine which resources may be missing.[21]

The second concept is homeostasis; and it refers to the maintenance of a steady state. Homeostasis is the tendency of a biological organism to seek and keep some kind of operating balance in its internal processes, or at least to keep processes within certain limits.[22] Homeostasis allows the social worker to: "(1) recognize a potential resistance to change in the client or the systems in which the client is embedded; and (2) find improved environmental conditions that are vital for human growth such as a new school or positive extracurricular activities."[23]

The third concept is entropy, which refers to the tendency in the universe to move towards disorder.[24] According to Hearn, the concept of homeostasis is essential and entropy should be controlled; therefore, he argues that the role of the social worker is to increase the order of the client and the environmental systems in which he operates.[25] In other words, if there are dysfunctional transactions between the client and one of his

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[20] William Gordon, "Basic Constructs for an Integrative and Generative Conception of Social Work," in *The General Systems Approach: Contributions Toward a Holistic Conception of Social Work*, ed. Gordon Hearn, 5-11 (New York, NY: Council on Social Work Education, 1969), 64.

[21] Gordon, "Basic Constructs," 64.

[22] Robert D. Leighninger, "Systems Theory," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 5, no. 4 (1978): 448.

[23] Leighninger, "Systems Theory," 448.

[24] Gordon Hearn, "Progress Toward a Holistic Conception of Social Work," in *The General Systems Approach: Contributions Toward a Holistic Conception of Social Work*, ed. Gordon Hearn, 63-70 (New York, NY: Council on Social Work Education, 1969), 65.

[25] Hearn, "Progress Toward a Holistic Conception of Social Work," 65.

environments, the social worker would work to improve the transaction and reduce the entropy in the system.

The fourth concept is equifinality. Equifinality assumes that there are multiple solutions to a problem.[26] Equifinality allows a social worker to approach a case through multiple avenues with one or more of those approaches leading to comparable results. In this case, there are many systems that could intervene to address problems and foster change as opposed to a singular solution. In contrast to equifinality is the concept of multifinality. Multifinality assumes that a single event or intervention introduced into a case can have multiple effects thereby changing the way a person views his or her problems.[27]

There are two parts to the fifth concept of feedback. The two parts are negative and positive. Negative feedback refers to the processes of monitoring and correction through which systems regulate themselves.[28] Positive feedback refers to the processes by which the characteristics of systems are amplified and become entrenched.[29] Each of the aforementioned concepts can be used in the practice of social work and the application of a systems theory.

Systems theory interacts with the Old Testament biblical foundation of the iThrive project. The foundational pericope found in Lamentations 2:18-19 reads:

> Cry aloud to the Lord! O wall of daughter Zion! Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite! Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before

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[26] Leighninger, "Systems Theory," 452.

[27] Meyer, "The Ecosystems Perspective," 23.

[28] Leighninger, "Systems Theory," 460.

[29] Leighninger, "Systems Theory," 460.

> the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street.

In this pericope, God has brought judgement against Jerusalem as a result of her continued disobedience and disrespect. Jerusalem is suffering the aftermath of the destruction. The prophet Jeremiah repeatedly warned Jerusalem of God's coming judgement and wrath that would destroy her if she did not repent and pray out to the Lord. Yet, Jerusalem not only refused to stop worshipping other gods and serve God; Jerusalem refused to repent. Therefore, as promised, God became angry and delivered God's wrath upon Jerusalem, leading to her eventual ruin and devastation.

The destruction of Jerusalem greatly impacted everyone—male, female, young, and old. Those who lived in Jerusalem were either killed or captured by the Babylonians and brought into slavery. Children were abandoned and or neglected by their parents and left alone on the streets where they would eventually die. In verse nineteen, Jeremiah pleads with Jerusalem to "Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street." If Jerusalem refused to pray to God for help for herself, she should at least petition God to help her children who are vulnerable and helpless.

The application of a systems theory to address this biblical foundation would view Jerusalem as a family system surrounding the children. The actions of Jerusalem, the parent, directly affect the children. Prior to the city's devastation, the children were exposed to sinful behavior including mothers eating their children. After the devastation, the children were exposed to death and violence. The culmination of this behavior, the variables within the family system in which the children were embedded, resulted in

unnecessary and unavoidable trauma for the children. If a social worker appeared on the streets of Jerusalem during this time, she would have understood the impact the devastation had on the children's mesosystem and would have immediately recommended an intervention. In the case of Jeremiah, he repeatedly implored Jerusalem to cry out to God to intervene for the lives of her children. If Jerusalem would not turn to God for herself, she should do so for her children. "Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isa. 49:15).

The historical foundation of the iThrive project is based upon the Orphan Train Movement and the European 'placing out' process during the mid-1800s. The Orphan Train Movement was established by Reverend Charles Loring Brace who, in collaboration with his colleagues, founded the Children's Aid Society (CAS) in New York City. Brace saw the orphan train as an answer to the child welfare problem in New York. The train transported children out of their oppressive environments and placed them into homes with Christian families in the Midwest. Brace believed that children would be better off with families who could give them a better life than with neglectful parents, crowded orphanages, or dangerous city streets. The premise of Brace's orphan train movement strategy can be aligned with the premise of the systems theory. Children are affected by the systems around them, and those systems are interrelated and connected. Moving children out of what was perceived as an oppressive environment and onto a train where they would be placed with a new family provided children with an opportunity to become productive citizens, thus making a positive impact on the system. However, if the children remained in their oppressive environments (on the streets of

New York), they would become vagrants, criminals or worse, terrorizing the community, thus making a negative impact on the system.

The historical foundation of the child welfare system and the field of social work originated from the need to improve the lives of children and families. The CAS and the Orphan Train Movement unearthed the need for states to improve their child welfare policies and practices. In 1912, Congress passed legislation which facilitated President Taft's establishment of the Children's Bureau, the first federal agency in the United States government dedicated to the welfare of children.[30]

The theology foundations of the doctoral project present an examination of the Latin American liberation theology of Gustavo Gutierrez and the black liberation theology of the late black theology pioneer, James H. Cone. Liberation theology requires an involvement with victims of oppression and a confrontation with the systems that facilitate oppression. The Liberation Theology Movement originated from the Roman Catholic theology and was intended to liberate poor, suffering people from economic, social, and political systems that resulted in an unjust oppressive context in Latin America. Its premise builds on teachings of the Christian faith and Christian practices as they relate to poor persons in their never-ending struggle to reach wholeness, as well as challenges for Christian doctrine (and the Christian Church) to take action. The concept of wholeness is one of the central tenets of systems theory.

In systems theory, there is an interconnectivity between the people and the various elements within their environment, which facilitates a reciprocal response when one element is changed. In the case of the Latin Americans who suffered as a result of the

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[30] "The Story of the Children's Bureau," Child Welfare, accessed January 23, 2020, https://www.childwelfare.gov.

capitalistic practices that occurred in their country during the 1960s, the poor became poorer and the rich became richer. Within this system, as elements such as politics, urbanization, and development shifted, the people were affected. Seeing the need to not only liberate the oppressed but to take action and challenge the oppressive systems that spread social injustices throughout the country, Gutierrez birthed a liberation theology. Christians committed themselves to the cause of the oppressed. It was a theology that spoke to the people who were suffering yet ignored by the church for the rich and politically connected.

Like Gutierrez, James Cone realized the necessity for a theology that spoke to the black community, the black condition, and the black context. Black liberation theology is a Christian theology that affirms the God in Christ who is undeniably on the side of the oppressed, poor, marginalized and disenfranchised. It affirms that God not only understands the suffering resulting from years of slavery and oppression, but God gets in the struggle with the oppressed and promotes a Gospel which promises that black lives matter. In his book, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, Cone writes:

> The appearance of black theology on the American scene then is due primarily to the failure of white religionists to relate the gospel of Jesus to the pain of being black in a white racist society. It arises from the need of blacks to liberate themselves from white oppression. Black theology is a theology of liberation because it is a theology which arises from an identification with the oppressed blacks of America, seeking to interpret the gospel of Jesus in the light of the black condition. It believes that the liberation of the black community *is* God's liberation.[31]

Systems theory in black liberation theology addresses a person's ecosystem (environment) and the oppressive interconnected elements and develops an intervention of liberation for its community.

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[31] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 40th anniversary ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 5.

To conclude that the liberation theologies for the Latin Americans or African Americans sufficiently addressed the issue of child maltreatment, the focus of the doctoral project, would be premature and inadequate. Neither theology addresses the specific needs of children. To satisfy these needs, a child liberation theology is required.

Child liberation theology connects to children who are inherently powerless and oppressed with a powerful and liberating God who can relate to them as the God of a child. The Christian belief is that God the Son, or 'Child,' became incarnate as the Christ child. God took on all the powerlessness, weakness, and neediness of human childhood for our salvation.[32] A liberation theology for children aligns with systems theory based on a child-centric solution which incorporates the totality of the child's ecosystem and its interconnectedness.

The modern academic discipline of social work is a helping profession that closely aligns with Project iThrive. As a discipline, social work is a complex multidimensional field that spans and intersects with a wide breadth of interrelated social sciences such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. The scope of social work reaches from direct focus on the individual, family, group, and community to social policy and social justice. Its methods for intervention (to problems) can be rehabilitative, preventative, and or protective in nature. Carol Meyer writes, "Among the many social problems in which social workers intervene are family dysfunction, child neglect and abuse, marital conflict, separation and divorce, adolescent adjustment, problems of aging,

[32] Janet Pais, *Suffer the Children: A Theology of Liberation by a Victim of Child Abuse* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990).

adaptation to physical and mental illness, homelessness, substance abuse, unemployment and job training, and child care."[33]

The tenets of social work were created to improve the lives of individuals, helping them live within the social structures that surround them. The systems theory emphasizes the role of the systems that surround the individual—primarily interpersonal systems of family and friends, social policy systems, and neighborhood systems—and provides entry points for social work intervention to improve the fit between the individual and their social environment.[34] Systems theory suggests that the interconnectedness of the systems in an individual's life creates a reciprocal connection in that when an intervention is introduced in one system, it will affect another.

The welfare of a child should be of utmost importance to everyone. The problematization of child maltreatment should be a priority for the communities in which such maltreatment occurs. Due to the magnitude of this problem, it cannot be solved by one entity, discipline, or person. The social worker cannot solve it alone nor can the community. To solve or even attempt to solve the problem of child maltreatment requires boldness and a departure from the status quo. The solution is a collaboration across disciplines and communities that interact within the ecosystem. The faith-based collaborative network established by the iThrive project will work with social workers, schools, law enforcement, and other stakeholders to improve the systems that are preventing children from thriving.

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[33] Meyer and Mattaini, *Foundations of Social Work Practice*, ix.

[34] Healy, *Social Work Theories in Context*, 115.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

When children are removed from their homes, they are faced with an incomprehensible trauma that can set their lives on an irreversible trajectory that leads them from the foster care system through the juvenile justice system and eventually into the penal system. The removal of a child from their home upsets the natural order of their developmental processes. Instead of flourishing under the spotlight of love and kindness, they are withering away in the darkness of fear and hopelessness.

The life of a child should exude elements of wonder and anticipation where each day is greeted by new possibilities. A child's life should never be impeded by the aftermath of trauma, violence, or abuse. Children are entitled to live in an environment with loving, responsible parents who will take care of them and keep them safe. They are expected to thrive and become responsibly productive adults. "I feel the suffering of millions. And yet, when I look up at the sky, I somehow feel that everything will change for the better that this cruelty too shall end, that peace and tranquility will return once more."[1] This sentiment, expressed more than seventy years ago, by Anne Frank is one that resonates loudly today when thinking about the traumatization inflicted on vulnerable children.

[1] Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Otto H. Frank and Mirjam Pressler, trans. Susan Massotty (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1995), 129.

Studies have shown that foster children deviate from typical development in all domains and are at significant risk for unusually high rates of psychological and behavioral problems and special needs.[2] This is not to suggest that all children placed into a state's foster care system are destined to a less than desirable outcome; there are many cases to the contrary. What it does suggest is that children typically fair better when they remain in the familial home with their biological parents, despite the quality of the parent-child relationship. The bond developed between a child and their biological parent (mother) is formed during the embryonic stages of the child's formation. The lifeline in the mother's umbilical cord may remain connected once severed, leaving the child with an innate longing for the one to whom they were connected.

Jesus, during his earthly ministry, told his disciples to bring the children to him to lay hands and to pray for them. Jesus also instructed the disciples not to forbid them from coming to him. When the disciples brought the children to Jesus, he laid his hands on them, for the kingdom of heaven belonged to them (Matt. 19:14). As Jesus understood the necessity to bless the children, the faith-based community must also recognize this necessity. The faith-based community is uniquely positioned within the neighborhoods in which children and families need assistance. The term 'faith-based' is used to integrate organizations across denominational barriers with a shared trust in their beliefs and values, not a set of immoveable religious standards. The fate of a child's life should not hang on the balance of a religious dictate, but on the exemplar established by Jesus Christ.

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[2] Bilha Davidson Arad, "Prenatal Features and Quality of Life in the Decision to Remove Children at Risk from Home," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 25, no. 1 (2001): 47-64, accessed December 5, 2020, https://www.sciencedirect.com/journal/child-abuse-and-neglect/vol/25/issue/1.

Can the faith-based community collaborate to problematize child neglect? This research question, derived from my personal musings and seminary experiences, is at the center of this research project. Childhood memories, devoid of the biological parental bond, left an insatiable quest to strengthen the family unit. Informal kinship care served as a substitute for direct involvement with the formal foster care system. First-hand experiences with children in the villages of Nigeria, Senegal, and Haiti ignited the passion that would drive a compulsion to serve the disenfranchised, reach the marginalized and advocate for the voiceless.

In seminary, interactions with liberation theologians challenged, confronted, and confounded my critical thinking skills, which led to more unanswered questions. Why are children being neglected? How can families get help? Who can support and strengthen the family unit? What can be done to keep children out of the foster care system? What is the faith-based community's role in the community? If the faith-based community were aware of the impact trauma had on children upon their removal from their parents and placement into the foster care system, would they be willing to support these at-risk families? At-risk children are those who face the risk of home removal due to issues of neglect or abuse; at-risk families are those who face the risk of having their child or children removed from the family home due to the aforementioned issues.

The research project was conducted in the Washington, D.C. (District of Columbia) Metropolitan area. In this metropolitan area, there are currently 858 children in foster care system ranging from ages zero to twenty-one.[3] The Washington, D.C. faith-based community consists of organizations in each of Washington, D.C.'s eight wards.

[3] "Demographics of Child in Foster Care PLC156," Government of the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency, February 12, 2019.

The need to reduce the number of children entering into the foster care system is great. The need to create a collaborative network of faith-based organizations to support at-risk families is far greater.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the local church was the catalyst of the community. If someone in the community needed something, they would go to the church for assistance, and the church in turn would provide support. The church served as a stopgap between the citizen and the government. When government resources were unavailable, the church would step in to help. The creation of a faith-based community support network will allow faith-based organizations to support at-risk children and families by doing the real work of ministry.

The biblical foundation for this project is Lamentations 2:18-19:

> Cry aloud to the Lord! O wall of daughter Zion! Let tears stream down like a torrent day and night! Give yourself no rest, your eyes no respite! Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches! Pour out your heart like water before the presence of the Lord! Lift your hands for the lives of your children, who faint for hunger at the head of every street.

This Old Testament pericope is Jeremiah's lament to Jerusalem to save the lives of her children who have been caught in the crossfire of sin and punishment. Analogous to the children of Jerusalem, the children who risk removal from their homes are caught in the crossfire of oppression and trauma.

Despite Jeremiah's laments and pleads to Jerusalem to repent from her sinful behavior and to pray to God for God's forgiveness, Jerusalem refused. She, God's chosen one, continued to revel in her acts of defiance and disobedience, ignoring the threat of God's wrath. Lamentations 2:18 picks up after God's wrath destroyed Jerusalem and where now she is languishing in the repercussions of her disobedience. The total

destruction, of this once revered city of Zion, has left its most vulnerable population neglected and orphaned on the streets.

The historical foundation chapter makes the connection of the origins of the foster care system to the Christian community. The Orphan Train Movement, established by Reverend Charles Loring Brace and his Children's Aid Society, migrated children from the streets of New York City to live with Christian families in the Midwest. Reverend Brace presumed that children needed to be rescued from either the city streets or from parents who could not care for them and or give the opportunity to have a better life. If the children were not rescued, they would become a menace to society with no future nor opportunity to become productive adult citizens.

In the theological foundations chapter, the case is made to link the liberation theology of Gustavo Gutierrez to the black theology of James H. Cone to the child liberation theology of Janet Pais. Each of these theological doctrines commands a view of God through the lens of the oppressed. Gutierrez's liberation theology challenges the church to adopt a missiological praxis in her treatment of the preferential poor by taking action against the social injustices that affect the marginalized and disenfranchised. James H. Cone's black theology takes liberation theology a step further and erases any vestiges of a white Christianity that justifies oppression. Cone's black theology constructs a theology that is adaptive to "black people's struggle for justice in a nation whose social, political, and economic structures are dominated by white racist ideology."[4] A further excavation of liberation theology that focused on the plight of children uncovers Janet Pais' child liberation theology. A child liberation theology, apropos to this research

[4] James H. Cone, "Black Theology in American Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 53, no. 4 (1985): 755-771, accessed December 12, 2020, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1464274.

project, addresses the specific needs of a child, introducing them to a God who can protect them.

In the interdisciplinary foundation, the field of social work is explored. An exploration into this field, delves specifically into systems theory. Systems theory, when partnered with social work, works within the contextual environment in which a child is embedded to discern the impact of the systems surrounding the child. A key variable in a child's ecosystem is the social work professional who is connected to the family, school, and community systems. A social worker offers interventions within the system to provide the most optimal outcome for the child. Systems theory proposes a relational system where systems in a child's ecosystem are interconnected. Therefore, when one system is impacted, it will have a reciprocal impact on another system in the ecosystem. If the church can support an at-risk family, not only will the family benefit, the neighborhood school that the child attends may also benefit. Faith-based organizations that are aware of the impact trauma has on children, upon their removal from their parents and placement into the foster care system, should be willing to support at-risk families.

Methodology

To test this hypothesis, three surveys were conducted. Two of the surveys were of quantitative design. The third survey was a hybrid design. The first two surveys were administered before and after the educational webinar. The educational webinar was developed based upon information derived from the historical and interdisciplinary works discussed in earlier chapters of this research. The webinar explored the origins of the

child welfare system, child trauma and the foster care system. It encompassed four modules (Modules one through four) and included video and audio clips used to enhance the webinar's content. At the conclusion of the webinar, participants gained an understanding of the child welfare and foster care systems; understood why children are removed from their parents; acquired a basic overview of child trauma and the impact the foster care system has on children; and recognized the opportunity to help at-risk families in their communities.

In addition to the webinar, a discussion with two child welfare advocates was also conducted. The participants of the discussion were Amber Leigh, a licensed Master Social Worker with a specialization in child trauma; and Leigh Esau, Founder and Executive Director of the Foster Haven/Foster Care Closet. Amber and Leigh are national child welfare advocates who are also foster alumni; both dedicated to the mission to improve the lives of children in foster care. The purpose of this discussion was to ascertain information, in a conversational format, about their personal experiences with the foster care system; child trauma and the impact it may have on a child in foster care from; and identify ways in which the faith-based community can support families. The discussion was incorporated into the webinar and provided a unique insight into the foster care system from experienced professionals.

The pre-and-post-surveys, survey one and survey two respectively, were designed to generate quantitative data. This research method was best suited for the pre-and-post-survey questionnaires due to the nature of data needed. According to Lietz and Zayas in their book entitled, *Evaluating Qualitative Research for Social Work Practitioners*, "quantitative research often seeks through measurement to test hypotheses, to determine

outcomes and to draw generalizable conclusions to a defined population."[5] The surveys were designed to test the doctoral project's hypothesis and to collect pertinent data to determine the level of interest in a collaborative faith-based network. The pre-survey gauged the participants' knowledge of child welfare and child trauma prior to watching the webinar. Subsequently, the post-survey evaluated the participants' knowledge of the same subject matter after watching the webinar.

Survey three was designed as a hybrid method for collecting data. As a hybrid, this survey was designed with both quantitative and qualitative aspects. Qualitative research "seeks to elucidate the nature of social practices, relationships, and beliefs along with the meaning of human experiences from the participants' point of view."[6] The hybrid survey allows for the best of both worlds. This survey type gathers data which allows for objectivity and makes room for subjectivity. The faith-based community in Washington, D.C. is comprised leaders of various faiths, beliefs, and religions. It was important to capture data that was objective in nature and subjective in intent to document the voice of the faith-based community leaders.

Surveys one and two each consisted of eleven dichotomous questions that required a response of true or false. The questions solicited responses from the respondents on their knowledge or understanding of specific child welfare/foster care concepts before and after the webinar. Survey one was a self-assessment which was used to gauge the respondent's current knowledge of those concepts prior to the webinar. The

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[5] Cynthia A. Lietz and Luis E. Zayas "Evaluating Qualitative Research for Social Work Practitioners," *Advances in Social Work* 11, no. 2 (2010): 188, accessed December 12, 2020, https://advancesinsocialwork.iupui.edu/index.php/advancesinsocialwork/article/view/589.

[6] Lietz and Zayas, "Evaluating Qualitative Research for Social Work Practitioners," 198, accessed December 12, 2020, https://advancesinsocialwork.iupui.edu/index.php/advancesinsocialwork/article/view/589.

responses from both surveys provided hard data that would be used to evaluate the effectiveness of the webinar. The hope would be that the respondents' knowledge of child welfare and foster care increased as a result of the webinar. Evidence of their increased knowledge would be disclosed on survey two.

Survey three, the hybrid survey, consisted of twelve dichotomous, open-ended and multiple-choice questions. The responses to the questions provided hard objective data as well as subjective data based upon personal thoughts and information. The purpose of survey three was to generate data on the faith-based organizations, their existing ministries, their demographics (location) and their willingness to support at-risk children and families. Participants were instructed to complete survey one, the pre-survey, after the webinar's introduction in module one. Survey two, and the post-survey, was completed by the participants at the conclusion of module four and survey three upon the completion of survey two.

Implementation

Project Implementation Agenda

- Solicitation
- Consent
- Welcome
- Pre-Survey – Survey 1
- Module 1: An Overview of Child Welfare & The System
- Module 2: Child Trauma
- Module 3: Felicia's Story
- Module 4: Child Welfare in Our Context
- Post Surveys
  - Survey 2
  - Survey 3

The implementation of the project began with the identification of faith-based organizations in the proposed target area to compile a sample population. All eight wards of the District of Columbia were considered in the geographical scope of the project. A list of fifty faith-based organizations was assembled, and the leaders of those organizations were contacted by email. The email provided an overview of the research project and detailed the level of effort involved to participate. The faith-based leaders were asked to view a webinar and to complete three online surveys within a fourteen-day time period. Upon receipt of the email, the leaders were asked to provide their decision to participate via email within five calendar days. Once the affirmative responses were received, electronic consent forms were sent to each person. The consent forms contained general information about the rights of the participants, the means of data collection, and the method in which the collected data would be utilized and stored. Additionally, the consent forms specified the confidentiality of the data and the project in general. All questions regarding the consent form and or the project were answered by email or telephone.

The online webinar consisted of four modules that the participants could view on their computers or smart devices from the comfort of their homes or offices. The electronic asynchronous nature of the webinar provided a level of flexibility that an in-person or synchronous training class could not provide. As each participant's signed electronic consent form was received, they, in return, received a detailed email containing the instructions for accessing the webinar and surveys. A hyperlink was created for each module and survey.

Module one, which was identified as An Overview of Child Welfare and the System, began with a welcome and a brief statement about the research project. The participants were then instructed to complete survey one, the pre-survey, by clicking the hyperlink that was provided in their instructional email. This survey was a self-assessment used to evaluate the participants' current knowledge of child welfare and foster care. After completing and submitting the survey, the participants continued viewing the first module of the webinar. The content of module one was extracted from the historical foundation of the thesis. This entailed an overview of the origins of child welfare, the efforts of Reverend Charles Loring Brace, the Children's Aid Society, the Children's Bureau, and the Orphan Train Movement. Basic child welfare terminology was defined, and the reasons children are removed from the parental home and placed into foster care was explained. Module one concluded with a video clip entitled, *Removed*, a young girl's journey through the foster care system.

In module two, identified as Child Trauma, participants received an overview of children and trauma. This module defined child trauma and described what constitutes a traumatic event for a child. The effects trauma has on a child, physically and mentally, upon removal from their parents was discussed in detail. Ways in which child trauma may manifest itself in children were described to give the participants general identifiers that they can use to recognize a child's traumatic reaction. Module two ended with an audio clip of a discussion on child trauma and the foster care system with Amber Jewel and Leigh Esau.

Module three was identified as Felicia' Story: Nine Months in the Bronx. This module portrayed the real-life experiences of a pregnant twenty-two-year-old woman

(Felicia) and her involvement with the child welfare system. Felicia is the mother of two children who are already under the supervision of the child welfare agency; and she faces the possibility of having her baby taken away on the day she gives birth - unless she can prove she is a suitable mother. This story is a universal story of love, reproductive rights, and the inequities present in the child welfare system that are experienced by poor minorities.

In the final component of the webinar, module four was identified as the Child Welfare in Our Context. This module focused on the faith-based leaders who are given an overview of child welfare in the United States and in the Washington, D.C. area. Demographic data of children and families involved in the child welfare system was provided to give a cursory glimpse of the disparities embedded within this system. National data trends support the notion of implicit bias and the racial anxiety that ensues as a result. The District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) mission and services were introduced. Each state has a child welfare agency that oversees its local/regional agencies. However, Washington, D.C. is not a state, therefore CFSA serves as the sole representative for the District of Columbia. The module and webinar concluded with an overview of the collaborative faith-based network that will be created in the second phase of the project. The network's goal is to prevent children from entering the foster care system by strengthening the family unit, when possible. It is imperative that children are kept safe, therefore if a child's safety is at risk by staying in the parental home, the network will support the child's placement in a foster or kinship home.

At the completion of module four, the participants were asked to complete survey two, the post survey. This survey was a duplication of survey one and was used to conduct another assessment of the participant's knowledge and understanding of child welfare and foster care concepts upon completion of the webinar. However, while the questions were the same as those on survey one, the participant's insight and perspectives were different. The data collected from this survey would be compared to survey one to determine the effectiveness of the webinar. The data would also serve to test the first component of the project's hypothesis. Now that the faith-based leaders from the sample population have been made aware of the effect trauma has on children who are removed from their parents and placed into foster care, will they be willing to join the collaborative network?

Lastly, the participants were asked to complete and submit the third and final survey. Survey three asked the faith-based leaders to provide qualitative data about their faith-based organization and its services or ministries in the community. The survey data was used to discover whether these organizations were currently supporting at-risk children and families in their communities. If they were not, would they be willing to do so. Survey three answers the final component of the project's hypothesis: are the faith-based leaders willing to join the collaborative network and support at-risk families.

Summary of Learnings

What I learned from the project and the project data is both intriguing and predictable. The implementation of the project proved to be more challenging than expected. Given the seriousness of the subject matter, the welfare of children, an

assumption that the willingness to participate in the project would be high, was erroneous. A representative sample population of the faith-based organizations was selected for the project. Of the thirty-nine organizations contacted, only sixteen or forty-one percent participated in the project. Four of the thirty-nine (ten percent) formally declined, citing the timing of the project and busy schedules prevented their participation. Two (five percent) initially agreed to participate, yet never completed any of the surveys. The remaining forty-four percent of the sample population did not respond to the solicitation email.

The only pertinent demographics captured on the surveys were the geographical demographics of the sixteen-participating faith-based organizations, displayed in Figure 3. No other demographics were relevant to the project, at this time. An analysis of the data shows that thirty-one percent of the faith-based organizations involved in the research project were from ward eight. Ward eight is the location where the majority of children involved in the child welfare system reside.

Ward	Frequency	Percent
Ward 1	4	25%
Ward 2	2	13%
Ward 3	0	0%
Ward 4	0	0%
Ward 5	1	6%
Ward 6	4	25%
Ward 7	0	0%
Ward 8	5	31%

Figure 3. Faith-based organizations by ward

An overall analysis of the pre-and post-surveys indicates that the respondents' knowledge of child welfare and child trauma increased after watching the webinar. This analysis may be the result an increase awareness and or a changed perspective of the

issues surrounding the foster care system and child welfare. Some of the participants who watched the webinar provided feedback about the overall training they received. More than one participant voiced their appreciation for the insight into the child welfare/foster care system and its impact on children. Prior to the training, they did not have an understanding of the risk children and families face, who may potentially live near their church. Other participants stated that they liked the virtual training format and the convenience of its online capability. The analysis for each survey question is depicted in the section below.

Question 1: If a child experiences trauma at a young age, it will not impact his teenage years.

As shown below in Figure 4 and Figure 5, 81.3% of the respondents selected the correct response, False, on the pre-survey. On the post-survey, this number increased by 6.2%.

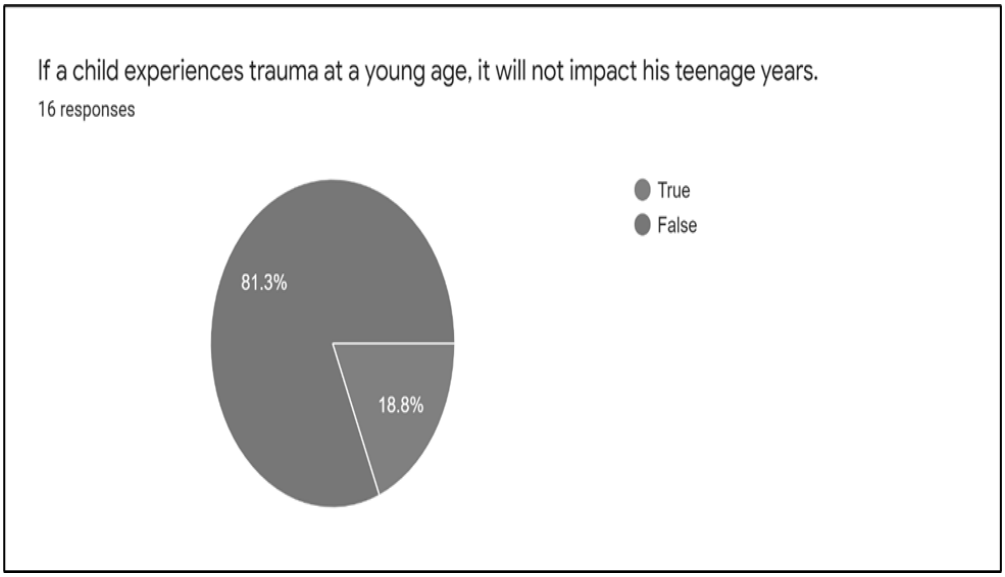

Figure 4. Pre-survey question – impact of child trauma

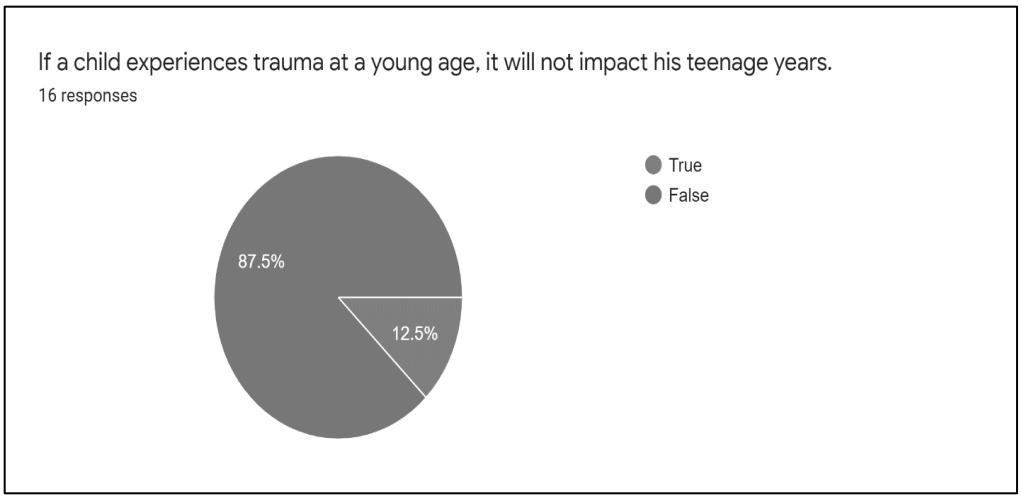

Figure 5. Post-survey question – impact of child trauma

Question 2: Children may be removed from their parents if they do not go to school regularly.

As shown in Figure 6, 81.3% of the respondents selected the correct answer, true, on the pre-survey. On the post-survey as indicated in Figure 7, this number increased by 18.7%. All respondents answered the question correctly after the webinar.

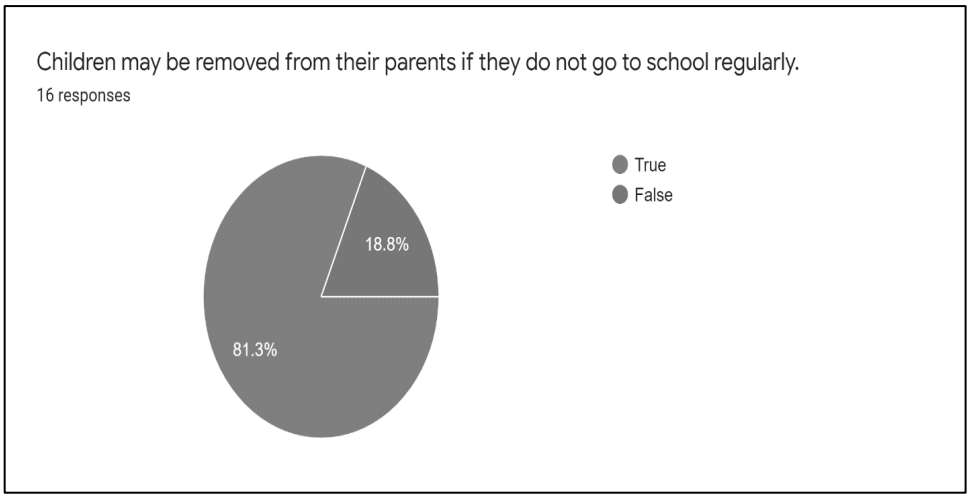

Figure 6. Pre-survey question – truancy and child removal

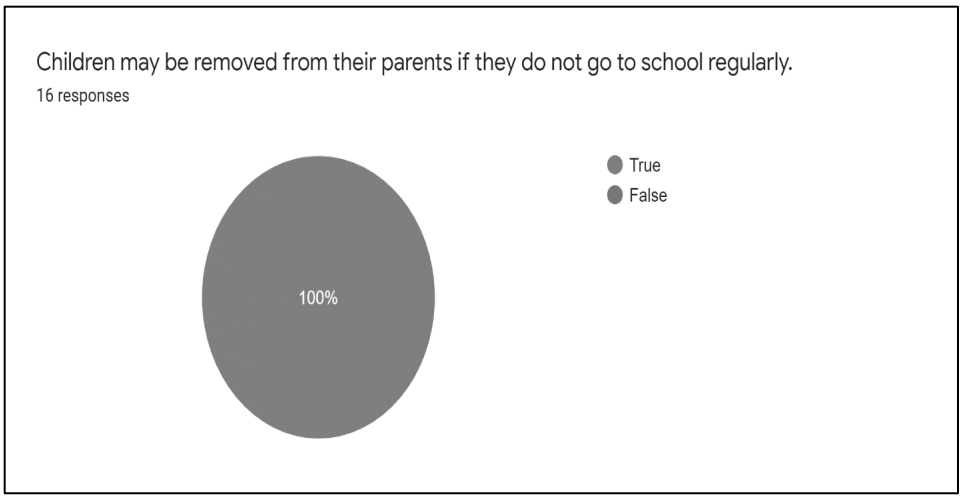

Figure 7. Post-survey question – truancy and child removal

Question 3: Most parents welcome Child Protective Services' involvement with their children.

As shown in Figure 8, 81.3% of the respondents answered the question correctly on the pre-survey. Figure 9 shows that this number increased by 12.5% on the post-survey.

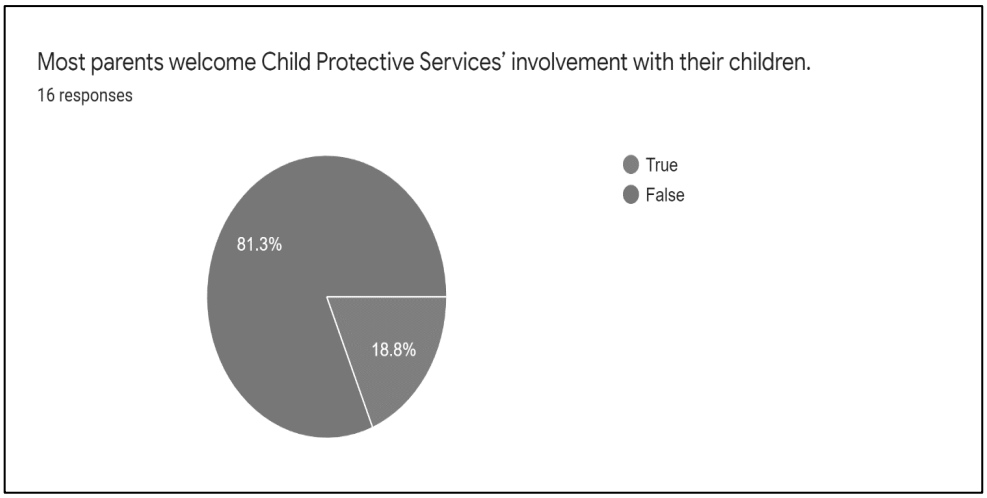

Figure 8. Pre-survey question – CPS involvement

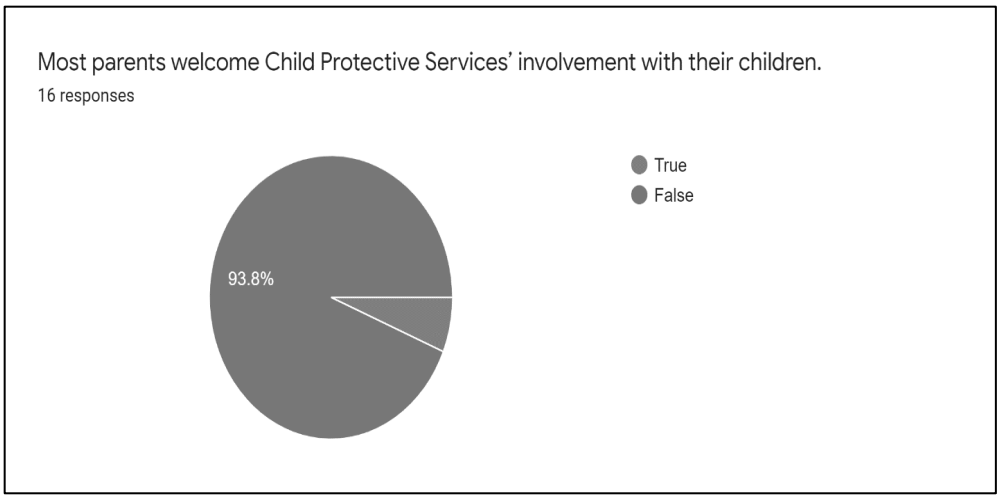

Figure 9. Post-survey question – CPS involvement

Question 4: Families do not need assistance from their surrounding communities.

As shown in Figure 10, 75% of the respondents selected the correct answer, false, on the pre-survey. Figure 11 shows that this number increased by 25% on the post-survey. All respondents selected the correct answer on the post-survey.

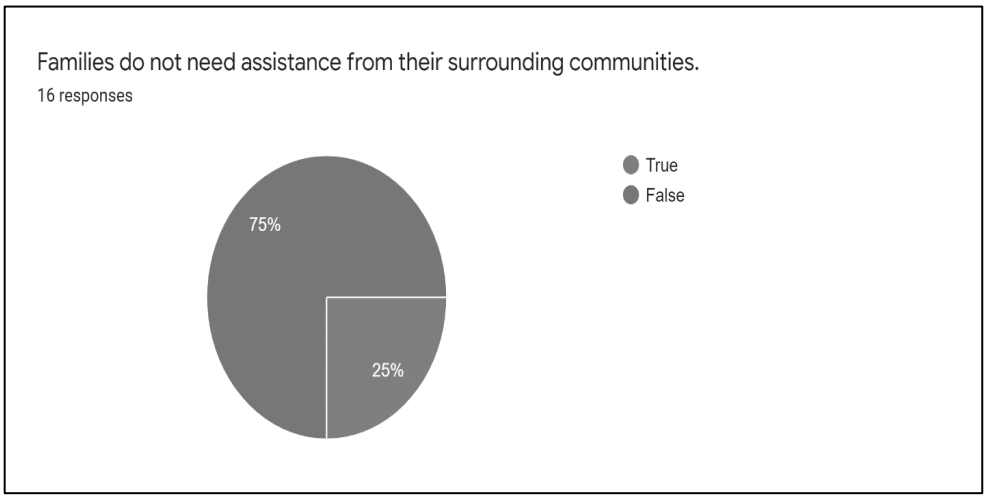

Figure 10. Pre-survey question – families and community assistance

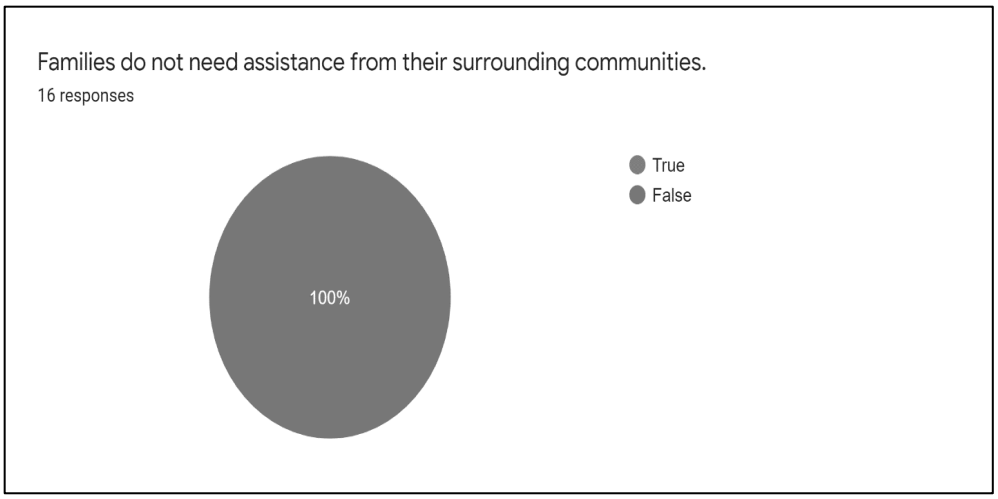

Figure 11. Post-survey question – families and community assistance

Question 5: The District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency provides preventative services for all families.

As shown in Figure 12, 25% of the respondents selected the correct answer, false, on the pre-survey. Figure 13 indicates that the number of correct responses increased to 56.3% on the post-survey; an increase of 31.3%.

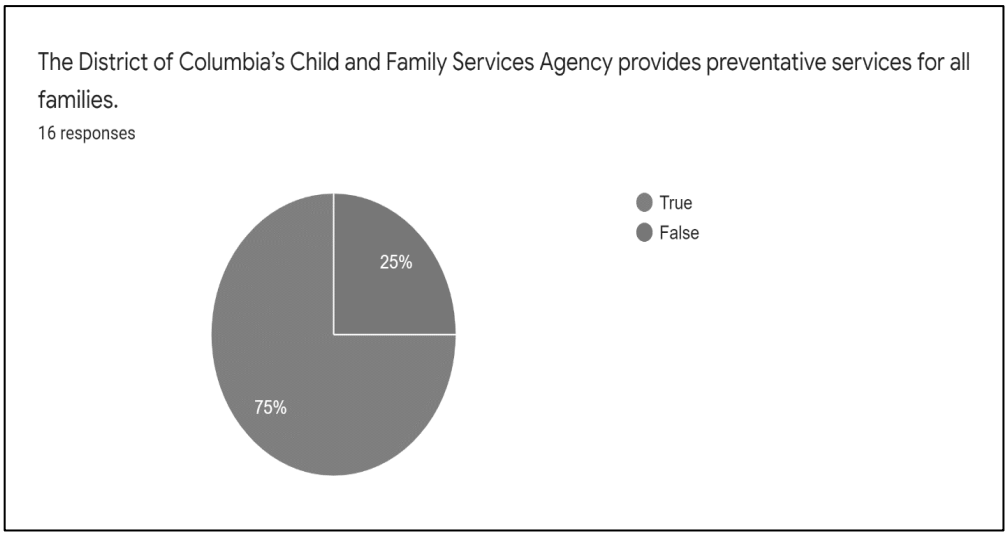

Figure 12. Pre-survey question – CFSA's preventative services

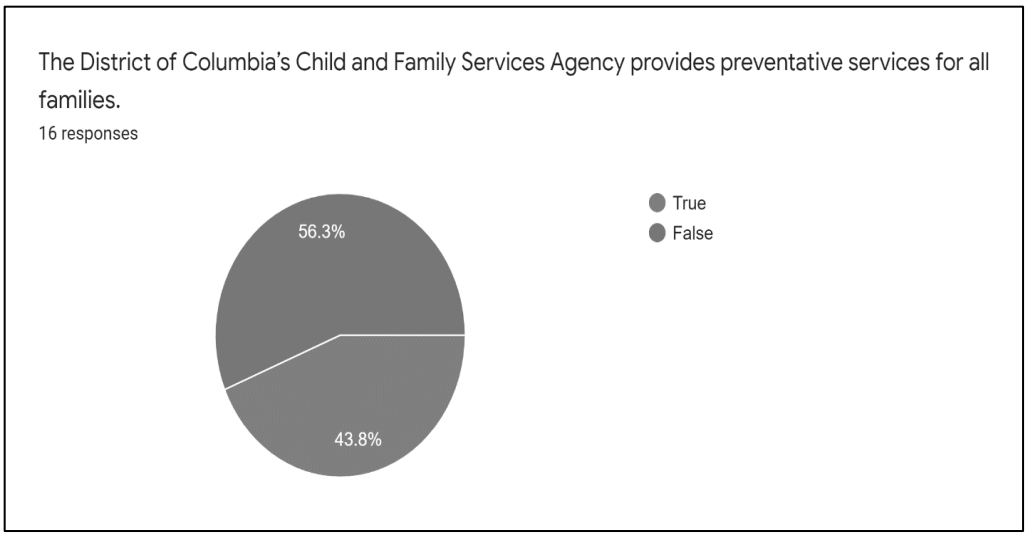

Figure 13. Post-survey question – CFSA's preventative services

Question 6: Parents are only required to provide the minimum level of care for their children.

Figure 14 shows that only 31.3% of the respondents selected the correct answer for this question on the pre-survey. On the post-survey as shown in Figure 15, this number increased by 43.7%.

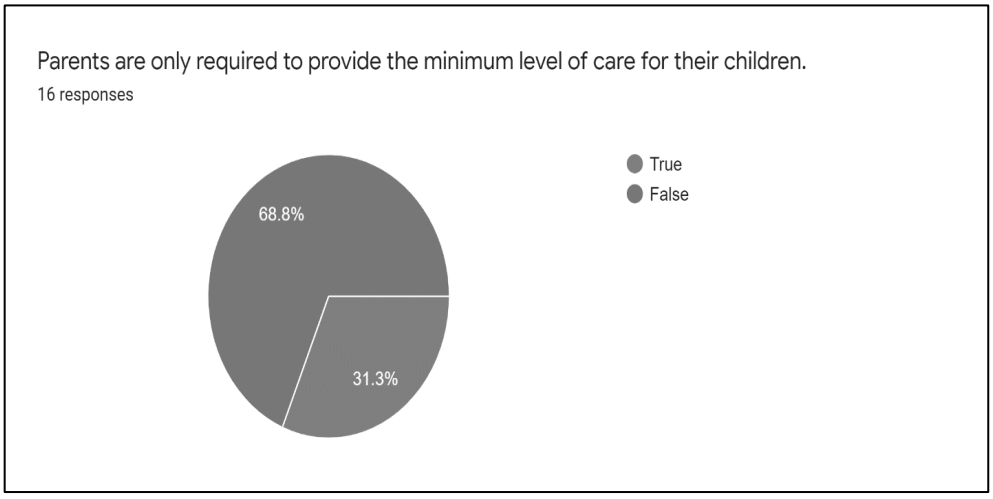

Figure 14. Pre-survey question – parents' minimum level of care

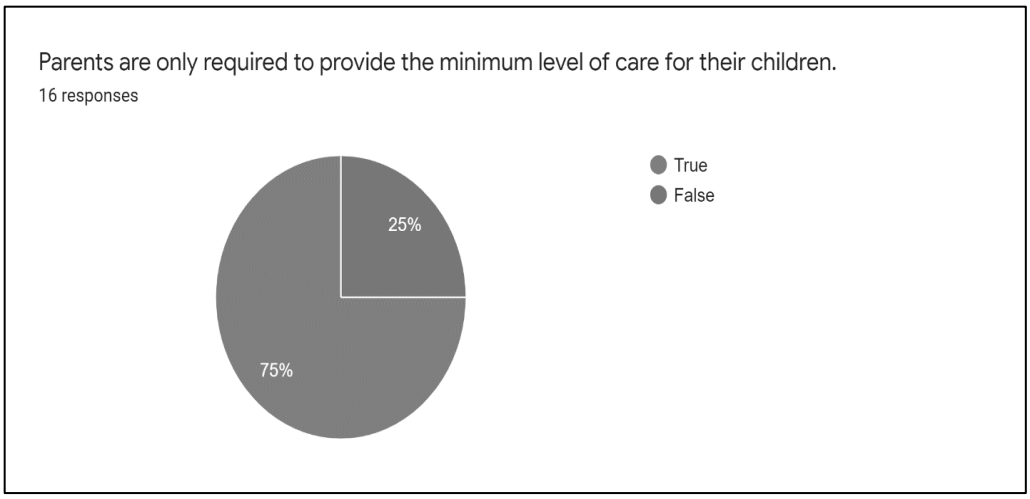

Figure 15. Post-survey question – parents' minimum level of care

Question 7: Children do not experience trauma when they enter into the foster care system.

As shown in Figure 16, 75% of the respondents selected the correct answer, false, on the pre-survey. On the post-survey, indicated on Figure 17, this number increased to 100%. All respondents answered the question correctly.

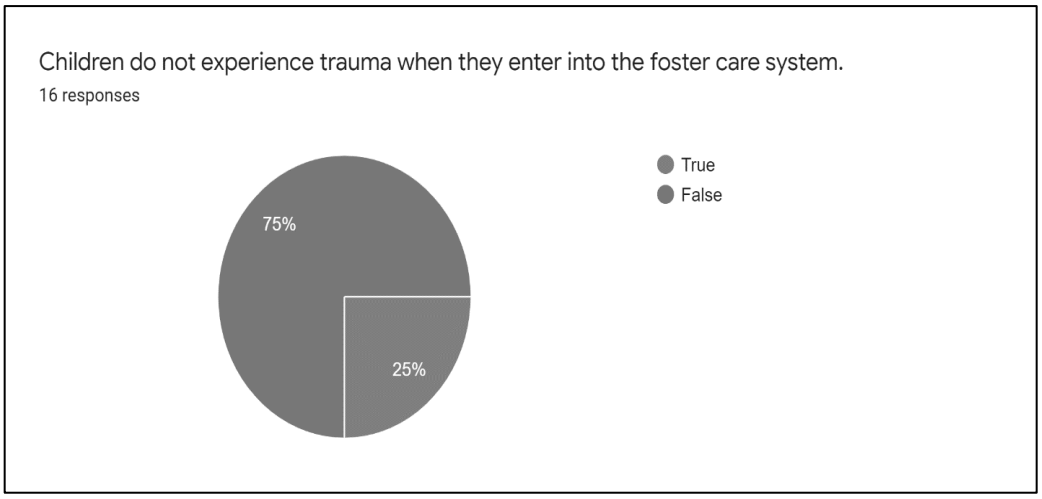

Figure 16. Pre-survey question – children experiencing trauma in foster care

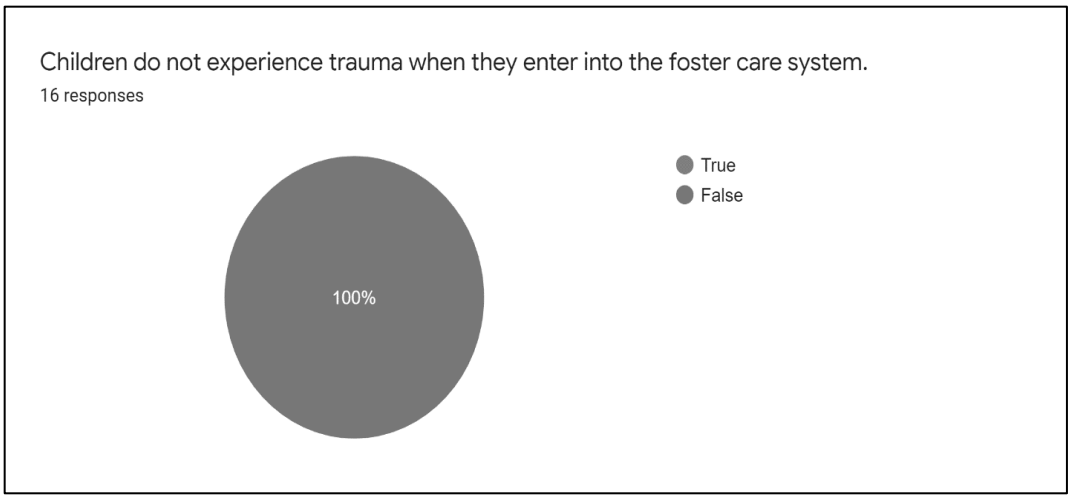

Figure 17. Post-survey question – children experiencing trauma in foster care

Question 8: Implicit bias does not play a role in child welfare.

As shown in Figure 18, 75% of the respondents selected the correct response, false, on the pre-survey. This percentage increased by 12.5% on the post-survey for a total percentage of 87.5%, as shown in Figure 19.

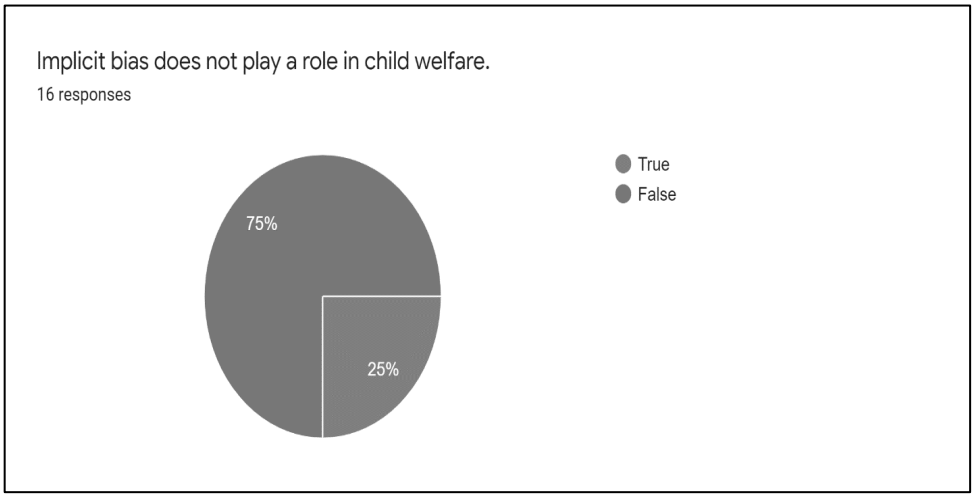

Figure 18. Pre-survey question – implicit bias in child welfare

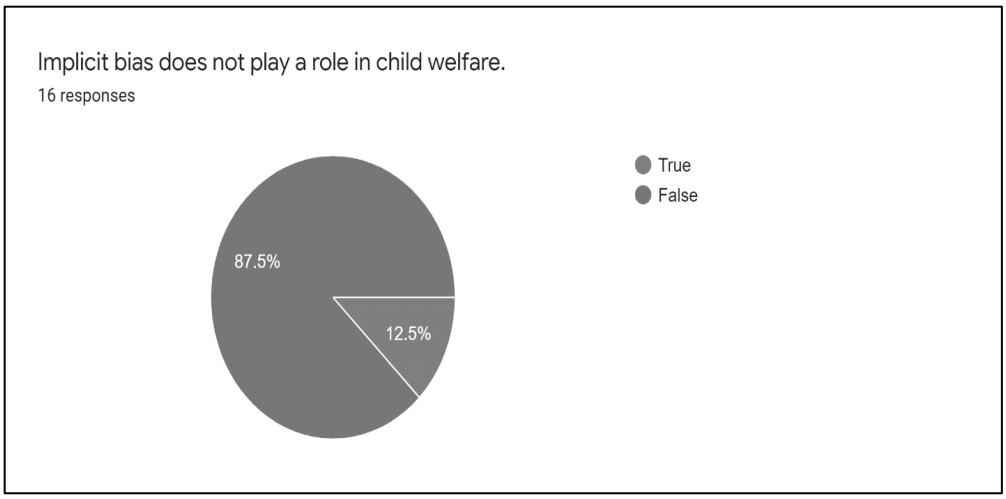

Figure 19. Post-survey question - implicit bias in child welfare

Question 9: The majority of the children who enter into the foster care system (in DC) come from Ward 5.

As shown in Figure 20, 68.8% of the respondents selected the correct answer, false, for this question. Figure 21 shows that this percentage increased on the post-survey to 81.3%, an increase of 12.5%.

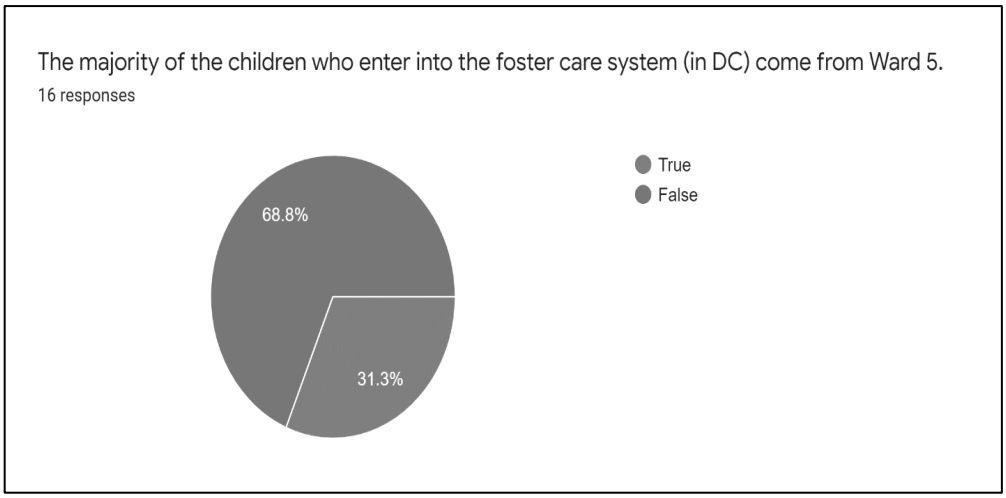

Figure 20. Pre-survey question – child in foster care from Ward 5

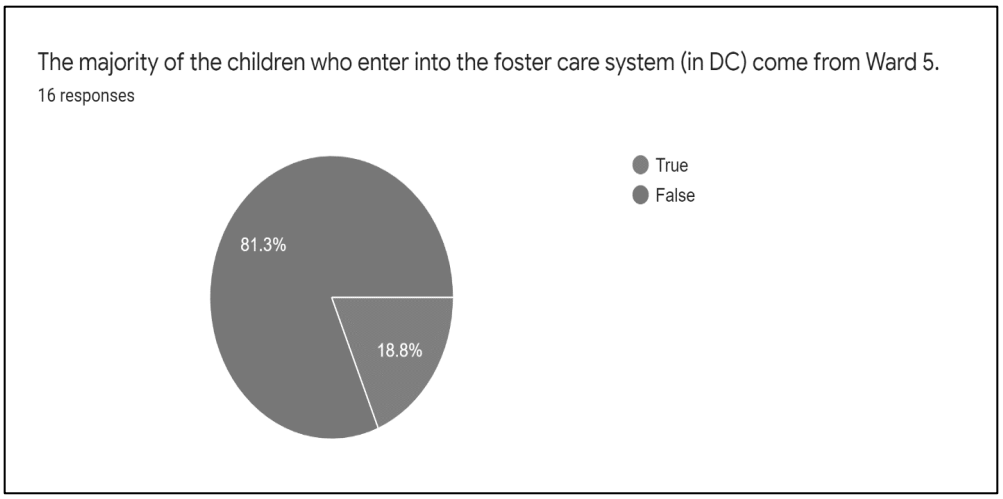

Figure 21. Post-survey question – child in foster care from Ward 5

Question 10: The majority of children in the foster care system are adopted by loving families.

As shown in Figure 22, 56.3% of the respondents selected the correct answer, false, for this question. Figure 23 shows that the percentage increased by 25% on the post-survey.

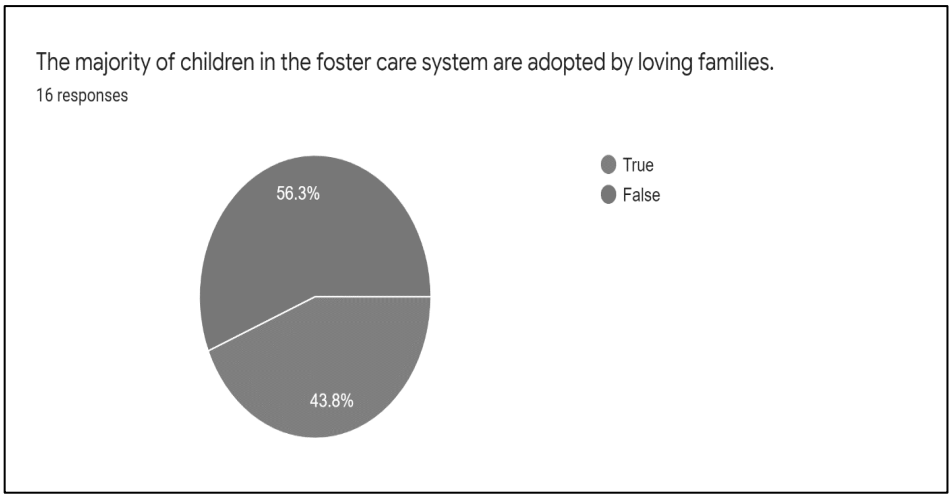

Figure 22. Pre-survey question –adoption of foster children

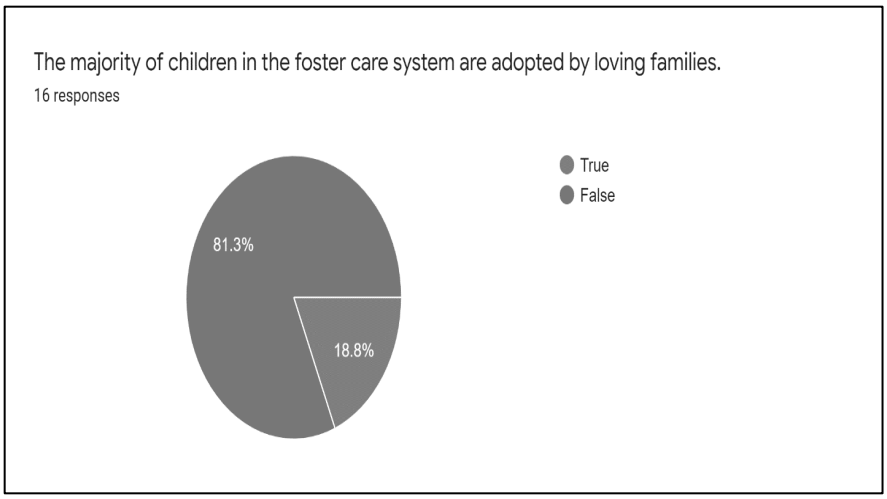

Figure 23. Post-survey question –adoption of foster children

Question 11: Faith-based institutions cannot make a positive impact on the foster care system.

As shown in Figure 24, 75% of the respondents selected the correct answer, false, for this question. In Figure 25, 93.8% of the respondents selected the correct answer on the post-survey. This indicates an increase of 18.8%.

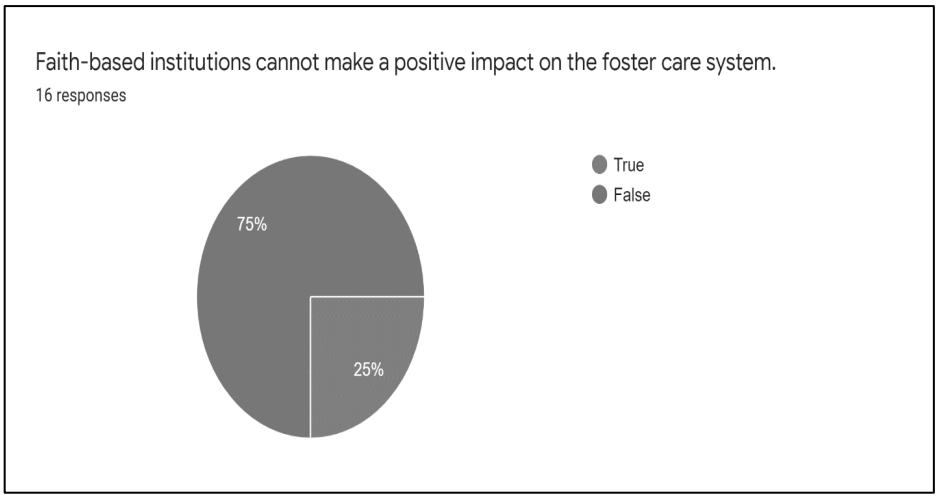

Figure 24. Pre-survey question –faith-based impact on foster care system

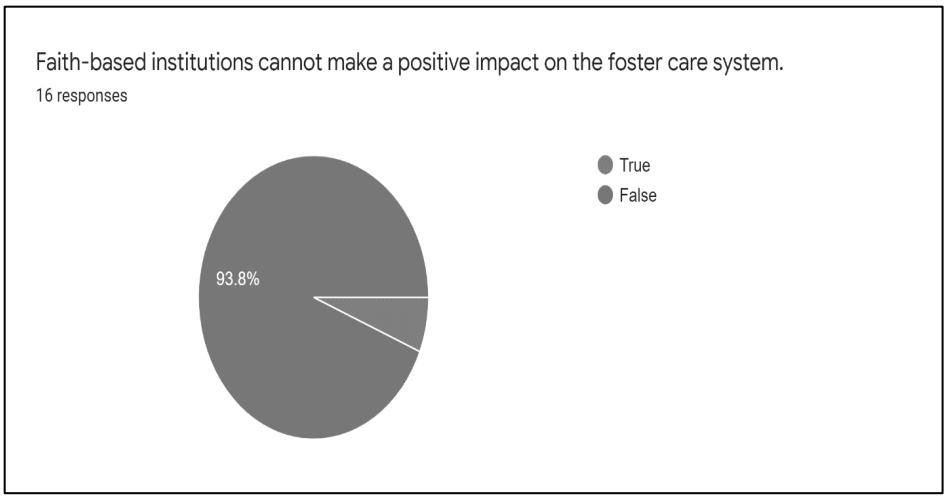

Figure 25. Post-survey question –faith-based impact on foster care system

An analysis of the qualitative data on survey three indicates that seven of the faith-based organizations were aware of at-risk families in their surrounding communities. The organizations that indicated an awareness of these at-risk families were across the city and not contained to one specific ward. The reason for this may be due to the faith-based leader not being aware of what is going on in their community or there are no at-risk families in that specific community.

Each of the faith-based organizations represented were already serving their communities by providing food, clothing, access to health care, school supplies and spiritual counseling to at-risk families that have identified a need for assistance. One organization provided transitional housing for young mothers between the ages of eighteen to twenty-four. Another organization partnered regularly with another faith-based organization to provide services to a broader population. One common theme that was prevalent in the responses was the impact COVID-19 has had on the community, resulting in either an increased demand for services or the organization's inability to serve the community.

When asked how the religious community could prevent children from being removed from their homes, the respondents provided answers that if implemented would greatly aid at-risk families. The responses were as follows:

- Serve as an advocate for children and families
- Provide preventative supports to the family
- Create an environment that would facilitate the positive interactions of families in the community
- Provide trained professionals and mentors to help children and families
- Offer referrals to professional resources if the organization cannot meet a specific need
- Teach parenting classes
- Offer personal development classes to adults
- Create a network that would offer childcare and respite care to give parents a break or to go on a job interview
- Hold after-school tutoring programs
- Assist families find affordable housing in the city
- Provide employment and job skills training

When asked if the faith-based organizations could support a family in need of assistance/family strengthening, fifteen of the sixteen respondents answered affirmatively.

Lastly, the data received for the final question on survey three supports the project's hypothesis, which states, if faith-based organizations were aware of the impact trauma has on children upon their removal from their parents and placement into the foster care system, they would be willing to support at-risk families. Each of the sixteen faith-based organizations responded affirmatively.

Conclusion

Faith-based organizations should problematize child trauma by supporting at-risk children and families in their communities. This is the overarching sentiment that arose at the conclusion of the project. To that end, the project was successful in that the faith-

based leaders gained an understanding of the child welfare and foster care systems; have an understanding of why children are removed from their parents; and have acquired a basic overview of child trauma and the impact foster care has on children.

The survey data from the pre-and-post-surveys will show a change in the respondents' answers after they watched the training webinar. Each of the post survey questions displayed an increase in the number of correct responses. This change may be the result of a greater awareness of the trauma children experience when removed from their parents and the subsequent consequences, and an expanded perspective on the foster care system.

For future surveys, I would use a different survey instrument that would allow greater manipulation of the data. The Google Forms application is limited in its features in terms of setting up the survey questions and gathering data. Conversely, Survey Monkey provides better functionality and tools for generating survey questions, data gathering as well as enhanced security features.

There were two areas in which I could improve the implementation of the project: participation and execution. First, I would utilize social media to market and socialize the webinar to a broader audience. Limiting the number of organizations that were initially asked to participate in the project resulted in a lower percentage of persons who responded. A broader sample population will allow a larger target audience to become aware of the need to assist at-risk children and families. The second area for improvement is execution. The original vision for the execution of this project was to deliver a virtual online training workshop to faith-based leaders. Not only was this training delivery method advantageous for those persons with busy schedules, but it also

proved crucial during the current nation-wide pandemic. The execution of the webinar could be immensely improved with better audio-visual tools. Better tools would facilitate improved sound and video quality.

The future of the iThrive Project is immeasurable. The need to support children and families and to reduce the foster care pipeline will be a constant factor in every state. The need to create collaborative networks to support families and prevent children from entering the system is static. The iThrive webinar is an adaptive training vehicle that can be easily modified for any state or local area.

During the planning of the project, I was contacted by national child welfare advocates who were interested in the project and creating a larger platform on which it could stand. Additionally, I was provided the opportunity to partner with DC 127, a faith-based organization that recruits adoptive and foster families, and the District of Columbia Baptist Convention.

The church is called to help children, God's most vulnerable population, and families. If the church is not reaching out to the community, what is its purpose? There should not be a family without food or a child in need of safety if the church or faith-based organization is in the same community. As the prophet Jeremiah implored Jerusalem to "Arise, cry out in the night, as the watches of the night begin; pour out your heart like water in the presence of the Lord. Lift up your hands to him for the lives of your children, who faint from hunger at every street corner," I am imploring the church to answer those cries, and to save the children at every street corner.

APPENDIX A

ITHRIVE WORKSHOP OUTLINE

iThrive Workshop Outline

1. Introduction
    a. Welcome
    b. Purpose of the project
    c. Objectives
    d. Pre-survey questionnaire
2. Overview of the history of child welfare and the foster care system
    a. Definitions and Terms
    b. Origins of the placing out/ child welfare system in the United States
        i. Video clip – the orphan train movement
    c. Child welfare laws in the U.S.
    d. What is Foster care?
3. Reasons children are removed from their homes/parents
    a. 'Minimum sufficient level of care'
    b. 'Best interest'
    c. What constitutes child abuse and neglect
    d. Video clips: Jane's Story; NYC ACS
4. Child Trauma
    a. Effects of trauma on children
        i. Abuse
        ii. Depression
        iii. Behavior
    b. Impact of mental illness on families and children
5. A Child's Journey through the System
6. Child Welfare in our Context
    a. Statistics in United States
    b. Statistics in DC (cumulative and by Ward)
    c. DC Child & Family Services Agency
    d. Neighborhood Collaboratives
7. The Need for the faith-based community to support at-risk families
    a. iThrive Project
8. Post survey

APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

Survey Questionnaires

Survey1 and Survey 2

True or False

1. If a child experiences trauma at a young age, it will not impact his teenage years.

2. Children may be removed from their parents if they do not go to school regularly.

3. Most parents welcome Child Protective Services' involvement with their children.

4. Families do not need assistance from their surrounding communities.

5. The District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency provides preventative services for all families.

6. Parents are only required to provide the minimum level of care for their children.

7. Children do not experience trauma when they enter into the foster care system.

8. Implicit bias does not play a role in child welfare.

9. The majority of the children who enter into the foster care system (in DC) come from Ward 5.

10. The majority of children in the foster care system are adopted by loving families.

11. Faith-based institutions cannot make a positive impact on the foster care system.

Survey 3

1. Where is your church or organization located?
2. Select the appropriate ward in which your church or organization is located.
3. Are you aware of any at-risk children or families who reside near your facility?
4. Are you aware of any children or families in your community who are or have been involved with the District of Columbia's Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)?
5. Please describe your organization's current involvement within your community.
6. Does your organization have any family-centric ministries that focus on strengthening the family unit?
7. Please describe your family-centric ministry(ies), the population it serves and its impact on that population.
8. When a child is removed from his home by CFSA's Child Protection Services (CPS) as a result of neglect or abuse, the resulting impact is traumatic for the child and the family. In your opinion, how could the religious community prevent children from being removed from their homes?
9. CFSA currently offers prevention services to assist children and families in an effort to avoid the disruption of the family unit. However, these resources are limited and may not be readily available to all who need them. How could you (your institution) support a family in need of prevention/family strengthening assistance?
10. In which areas would your organization be willing to support an at-risk child or family?

11. Are you interested in joining the collaborative network of faith-based institutions that will provide support to at-risk families and children?
12. If you are interested in joining the collaborative network, please provide your contact information.

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